

45-year-old man dies after violent police assault in Brandenburg, Germany

Tino Jacobson, Markus Salzmann
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Germany has witnessed another case of police violence resulting in death. In Königs Wusterhausen, Brandenburg, southeast of Berlin, Vitali N., a 45-year-old Moldovan man, who had a Bulgarian passport in order to work in Germany, died in Berlin's Neukölln Hospital after being assaulted by the police. Since 2014, Bulgarian and Romanian citizens have been allowed to work in Germany without a work permit and are not infrequently exploited in slave-like conditions.

On the evening of April 11, residents of a house on Karl-Marx-Strasse in Königs Wusterhausen, where Vitali N. had recently been living, called the police around 9 p.m. and complained about a disturbance of the peace. According to the police report, Vitali N. allegedly "remained on a property without permission, kicked objects and hit a passenger car." Allegedly, he could not be dissuaded to leave even after being asked by the police officers. The report goes on to say, "He behaved aggressively, biting and displaying mental [health] issues."

According to media reports, the police officers then used brute force against Vitali N. First, they used pepper spray, even though it is known that this can be extremely dangerous during arrests. If pepper spray is inhaled, it can cause severe nausea and shortness of breath; it can also cause swelling of the airways and acute choking.

The tersely written police report states that Vitali N. was subsequently "able to be secured and restrained by the police officers. Immediately afterwards he fainted, and the handcuffs were released." After his breathing stopped, an emergency doctor was called, and the man was taken to a hospital "for medical treatment."

When he arrived at the intensive care unit at Klinikum Neukölln, some 30 kilometres away, doctors could do nothing more for him. He was diagnosed with hypoxic brain damage, which occurs because of a severe lack of oxygen in the brain. The only conclusion can be that

Vitali N. was suffocated to death. Soil was found in his airways and lungs, which was also on his face when he was admitted.

Based on this evidence, it can be assumed that Vitali N. had his face forcibly held into muddy soil for a long time, whereupon he suffocated. At the time of the assault, it was raining heavily in the area and, according to local residents, Vitali N. was pushed to the ground by the police officers on a patch of grass.

The death certificate issued by the attending physician is clear, writes the *Taz* newspaper: Vitali N. had suffocated. "Most severe anoxic brain damage," it states. Oxygen deficiency in the brain "by forcibly pressing the face and thorax to the ground in a prone position."

The Berlin public prosecutor's office and the criminal police department then began an investigation.

The *Taz* quoted from internal documents that included parts of the patient's file, a police search record as well as the report of the emergency doctor who first treated Vitali N. in Königs Wusterhausen, which reveal serious discrepancies. Attempts are obviously being made to conceal the course of events of the brutal police operation resulting in death to exonerate the culprits.

The notes of the emergency physician state: "Handcuffs are still on." This contradicts the police account, which claims the man's handcuffs were released after he passed out. Securing unconscious people is considered extremely dangerous because it makes medical treatment more difficult and increases the risk of suffocation.

The emergency physician also noted that Vitali N. had wet soil in his mouth and nose. During the autopsy, however, no earth residue was allegedly found in the body, the spokeswoman for the Berlin public prosecutor's office told the media. According to the prosecutor's office, the autopsy did not show any signs of external force and third-party actions as the cause of death.

In fact, however, the autopsy revealed that the dead man

had massive haemorrhages on his back and shoulder, which obviously resulted from the strong pressure with which the police officers pushed the victim to the ground.

In the next few weeks, fine tissue and toxicological examinations will be carried out to find any traces of soil. But this will prove to be rather difficult, since Vitali's throat and lungs were cleaned by the doctors and suctioned when the intubation was performed.

It is also unclear why a police chief inspector from Königs Wusterhausen instructed the Berlin police, via a request for assistance, to attend the clinic after Vitali N. had been admitted to the hospital, in order to confiscate the clothes of the deceased and to insist blood samples be taken to test for alcohol and drugs. The Cottbus public prosecutor's office, which has jurisdiction over Königs Wusterhausen, said it had not ordered this. The police authorities responsible have yet to issue a statement on the matter.

Vitali N.'s blood test after his admission to hospital showed he had consumed neither alcohol nor drugs. Vitali N.'s brother, Ivan, characterized the victim as a quiet, inconspicuous person who generally drank little alcohol. He had simply wanted to lead a normal life in Germany and escape the extreme poverty that was a sad daily routine in Eastern Europe, his brother said.

The death of Vitali N. is part of a wave of police violence in Germany. Last October, Kupa Mutombo died in Berlin's Charité hospital. He too was a victim of police brutality. Just weeks before that, the racist actions of Berlin police officers against a Syrian family sparked a storm of outrage.

"We have fundamental structural problems in dealing with the unlawful use of force by the police," criminologist Prof. Tobias Singelstein of the Ruhr University in Bochum said in the documentary "State Violence—When Police Officers Become Perpetrators" produced by the political magazine *Kontraste*.

Nationwide, officers perpetrate at least 12,000 cases of "illegal police violence" annually while on duty, as Dr. Singelstein noted in 2019 in the interim report of his research project Kviapol. But only about 2,000 cases of police violence are reported each year, and even in those few cases, court proceedings are opened in less than two percent. "Convictions occur in less than 1 percent of reported cases," the criminologist explained.

This ever-expanding police violence goes hand in hand with the continual increasing of the powers of the police and security apparatus. The previous state government in Brandenburg, made up of the Social Democrats (SPD)

and Left Party, passed a new Police Law at the beginning of 2019. Its cornerstones included the "expansion of personal checks without requiring just cause, reporting requirements in the area of the Assembly Act without needing a court order, preventive detention as well as contact and residence bans without any concrete signs of a crime, expansion of the storage times of police video surveillance, expansion of public searches in suspected crimes and the use of hand grenades against people."

For the current state government of the SPD, Christian Democrats (CDU) and the Greens, this still does not go far enough. They are preparing a comprehensive tightening of the Police Law. According to their plans, the seamless monitoring of messaging services and online searches are to be made possible without any significant hurdles. In addition, the automatic recognition and storage of vehicle license plates would be possible without needing any just cause.

Under the SPD-Left Party state government, the police had already stored a total of 40 million photos of vehicles in a database from 2017 to 2019, resulting in massive criticism from lawyers and data protectionists. An official who criticized this blatant and constitutionally questionable surveillance was silenced and transferred.

In neighbouring Berlin, too, the new CDU-SPD state government is planning to massively increase the powers of the state and expand those of the police apparatus.

Ultimately, police violence and attacks on democratic rights are an expression of increasing class tensions. While billions go into arming the military, any opposition to this is suppressed by force if necessary. Rampant police violence is deliberately covered up by the state and political establishment and is part of the development of a police state.



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