

Gunman massacres 14 at university in Czech capital Prague

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A gunman killed 14 people on December 21 at the Faculty of Philosophy at Charles University in Prague and injured 25 others, some seriously. According to police, the perpetrator then took his own life.

The victims of the rampage have since been identified. They include students and employees of the university. Among those killed were the head of the Institute of Musicology at Charles University, Lenka Hlavková, and a translator and expert on Finnish literature, Jan Dlask. An employee who studied sign language at the university is also among the victims, according to a newspaper report.

A day of national mourning was held for the dead the day before Christmas. Flags flew at half mast on public buildings and at noon the government called for a minute's silence. Church bells rang throughout the country, and much of the Advent events in the capital were canceled.

Students and employees at Charles University in particular are still in shock. Founded in 1348, the university is one of the oldest in Europe. Well-known personalities such as Franz Kafka and Rainer Maria Rilke studied there. In 1911, Albert Einstein received a professorship at the institution.

While numerous questions remain unanswered, there is no doubt that this is the worst mass shooting in many years in the Czech Republic. In recent days, the police have made several statements about the known course of events as well as the perpetrator himself.

The 24-year-old history student David Kozák apparently opened fire indiscriminately on those present in the main building of the Faculty of Philosophy on Jan-Palach-Platz on Thursday afternoon. According to the police, he then shot himself, but the autopsy has yet to confirm this.

Around 3 p.m., initial reports of gunfire emerged, and

a rapid response task force was on the scene within twelve minutes. The perpetrator fired shots in the building, but could also be seen on a balcony under the roof, from where he shot at passers-by on the street with a rifle with a scope and injured some.

University students and staff posted on social media that they had barricaded themselves in lecture halls and offices. Some climbed out of the window to escape the gunman. Some eyewitnesses also reported hearing an explosion. The perpetrator's body was found at the end of a balcony where he had been surrounded by security forces.

It is suspected Kozák had murdered his father before the attack at Charles University. On Thursday afternoon, the police found his body in the small town of Hostouň west of Prague. Kozák left a booby trap in his parents' house, but it was not triggered.

Earlier, the police had been alerted by Kozák's mother that she had received the news from a friend that her son was on his way to Prague and was planning to take his own life. A manhunt was then initiated and a university building on Celetná Street, where he was to attend a lecture that day, was evacuated and searched. During the search, reports of gunshots in the main building were received.

Prague Police Director Petr Matějek confirmed that there is also likely to be a connection to another murder. A 32-year-old man and his two-month-old baby were found shot dead in a wooded area on the outskirts of Prague six days prior to the university shooting. There are clear indications that Kozák was also the perpetrator here, according to Matějek. However, the final investigations are still pending.

Little is known about Kozák. He had no criminal record, but was apparently a gun enthusiast. He had a gun license and, according to media reports, legally

possessed twelve firearms, including several pistols, a shotgun, a semi-automatic rifle and four silencers. According to a police report, he also brought a suitcase with ammunition into the university building.

Investigators said the perpetrator may have been inspired by mass shootings in other countries. According to reports in local media, he wrote on Telegram that he hated the world and wanted to cause as much pain as possible. However, there are also considerable doubts about the authenticity of the post.

From the findings to date, the student's motives cannot be definitively determined. His apparent serious psychological problems also explain this brutal outbreak of violence only superficially. Deeds such as this, which are becoming increasingly common internationally, are based on deeper social causes that are systematically ignored by the political establishment and the media.

Across Europe, there have been horrific mass shootings with dozens of deaths in recent years. The Czech Republic is also experiencing outbreaks of violence with increasing frequency. In February 2015, a 63-year-old man in Uherský Brod in the southeast of the country shot eight people in a restaurant before taking his own life. In 2019, a gunman shot and killed six people in a hospital in Ostrava. In August 2020, a man in Bohumín killed eleven people, including several family members, by arson.

This is accompanied by an enormous brutalisation of society. While the government and the head of state publicly deplored the victims of the rampage, they fully back NATO's war against Russia in Ukraine and the massacre of the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip.

Former NATO General and current President Petr Pavel has long called for tougher action against Russia, regardless of the possible consequences.

The contempt for human life is even more evident in the government's attitude to the genocide in Gaza. When the UN General Assembly voted in favour of a humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza earlier this month, the Czech Republic was one of the few countries to vote against it, along with Israel and the US. Prime Minister Petr Fiala of the right-wing Citizens' Democrats even explicitly spoke out against "humanitarian pauses" and has been reiterating his unconditional support for the Israeli government for weeks.

Shortly before Christmas, the Czech military's new defense concept was presented, which is based on the already decided increase in the military budget to at least two percent of GDP.

Military representatives have made it clear that this will not be enough for the goals set. By 2030, 60 percent of the defense budget should be spent on the purchase of new weapons systems of the most modern design. This is to be completed by 2035 and the army is to be increased to 30,000 soldiers and 10,000 reservists.



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