

Austria: Eleven dead in Graz school shooting

Markus Salzmann
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On June 10, a gunman killed ten people and seriously injured eleven others at a school in Graz, Austria. The attack itself lasted only a few minutes. Immediately after police arrived, the perpetrator committed suicide in a school restroom.

The victims were nine teenagers, aged 14 to 17, and a teacher. The gunman, Arthur A., was a former student at the Borg-Gymnasium in Graz. The 21-year-old had dropped out of school after sixth grade. The perpetrator had no relationship with his victims; only the teacher he killed was known to him personally.

A nationwide minute of silence was held on Thursday morning. Flags at all public buildings were flown at half-staff, and Chancellor Christian Stocker (Austrian People's Party, ÖVP) ordered three days of national mourning. In addition to Stocker, the interior and education ministers of the Vienna government also travelled to Graz.

The school's students and teachers are still in shock and school operations have been suspended until further notice. The outpouring of sympathy for those killed and injured was profound and extended far beyond the Styrian capital.

While numerous questions surrounding the rampage remain unanswered, there is no doubt that this is the worst murder attack in Austria in decades. In recent days, police have released some information about the course of events and the perpetrator himself.

The 21-year-old, who lived with his mother just outside Graz, had apparently planned the crime down to the last detail. According to investigations, he was armed with a sawn-off shotgun, a semi-automatic Glock pistol, and a hunting knife. A pipe bomb was recovered from his apartment during a subsequent search. However, it was not functional. Investigators assume he lacked the necessary time or knowledge to do so.

Arthur A. apparently shot at students and teachers

indiscriminately. When he was found in the school restroom after his suicide, he was wearing a headset. Whether he had contact with anyone before or during the attack has not yet been conclusively determined.

The attack had been planned over a long period of time. The attacker had been undertaking target practice since March and acquired weapons legally in April and May.

A week after the horrific act, the perpetrator's motive remains unclear but evidence is emerging that he had mental health problems. In 2021, he was found mentally unfit for military service but apparently never received psychiatric or psychological treatment.

He is described as an inconspicuous loner who led an extremely withdrawn life. Photos and previous social media posts suggested that the 21-year-old perpetrator may have been inspired by the school massacre at Columbine High School in the US state of Colorado in April 1999.

Chancellor Stocker and his governing coalition, consisting of the conservative People's Party, the Social Democrats (SPÖ), and the right-wing neo-liberal Neos, announced in response to the attack that they intend to tighten Austria's relatively liberal gun laws. A higher minimum age and an aptitude test for gun ownership are under discussion.

In addition, psychological counselling in Austrian schools is to be increased. Government representatives did not explain how this would be reconciled with the comprehensive austerity package passed by the government, which also includes drastic cuts in education.

Instead, voices from all political parties are increasingly seeking to exploit the school shooting to censor social media and expand the powers of the police and other security agencies. Plans include, for example, increased spying on private computers using Trojans and electronic ankle bracelets for dangerous

individuals.

The current findings regarding the perpetrator's motives provide no explanation for the crime, nor are the planned measures suitable for preventing similar acts of violence.

The likely psychological problems only superficially explain this brutal outbreak of violence. Acts like these, which are becoming increasingly common, have deeper societal causes that are deliberately ignored by politicians and the media.

In the US, there have been 6,719 mass shootings since the beginning of 2013, in each of which at least four people were shot dead. But rampages with dozens of deaths have also occurred throughout Europe in recent years—including Austria.

In 1997 and 2018, there were outbreaks of violence in schools in Lower Austria. In a few days, the so-called Graz rampage will mark its tenth anniversary. On June 20, 2015, a 26-year-old drove an SUV through the city center, killing three people and injuring 36 others. The perpetrator was sentenced to life imprisonment and committed suicide in prison in 2023.

The background to such incidents is the enormous brutalization of society. While state and federal politicians mourn the victims of the rampage, at the same time they fully support NATO's war against Russia, which could escalate into a nuclear war, and Israel's genocide against the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip.

The three ruling parties, which took office in Vienna this year, are not only calling for tougher action against Russia. With the Neos, a governing party is the first time openly advocating the lifting of Austria's traditional stance of neutrality and the deployment of Austrian soldiers in combat missions. While the coalition has approved harsh austerity measures in almost all areas, the rearmament of the Austrian army is to be intensified by €16.6 billion until 2032. This is the largest investment plan in the history of the Austrian armed forces.

The contempt for human life is even more evident in the government's stance on the genocide in Gaza and Israel's attack on Iran.

After former Federal President Heinz Fischer (SPÖ) recently called on the government to issue a critical statement against Israel's actions in the Gaza Strip, Stocker, Vice Chancellor Andreas Babler (SPÖ) and

Foreign Minister Beate Meinl-Reisinger (Neos) responded negatively, declaring that Israel had every right to "respond militarily" to the 2023 Hamas uprising. Even after Israel's unprovoked attack on Iran, the government is merely demanding "caution" from both sides.

The right-wing policies of all established parties have also led to Styria being governed by a state government led by the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) since the end of last year. Under Governor Mario Kunasek, the FPÖ has already initiated widespread attacks on migrants and socially disadvantaged groups. The party also maintains close ties to the violent neo-Nazi scene in Austria and Europe.



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