



BACKGROUND PAPERS

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Combating Right-Wing Violence and Hate Crimes in Germany

In 1999, there was a significant decrease of 9.2% (see [note](#)) in the total number of offenses involving right-wing motivations, anti-foreigner motivations or anti-Semitism. During the same period, however, violent offenses with right-wing motivations increased about 5.4%. Of these violent offenses, 60% were anti-foreigner hate crimes.

Within the right-wing scene, only a very small number of perpetrators who are motivated by a coherent right-wing ideology. In fact, most are not members of a political group or party.

Historical and Social Context

The figures listed above remain lower than the levels connected with communism's disintegration in the early 1990s. The relatively lower levels reflect the German government's and people's ongoing efforts to limit the growth of right-wing activities.

In 1994 the government introduced tough laws aimed at curtailing extremist organizations and anti-foreigner violence (see page 3). Combined with widespread educational efforts, these changes led to a fall in the number of right-wing offenses in 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996 and 1998. These measures to foster tolerance and combat violence continue and will be intensified.

The increases in right-wing motivated offenses in 1991 and 1992 were clearly linked with the dramatic changes in Germany and Europe around that period. In 1989, the Berlin Wall fell and the communist government in eastern Germany rapidly and unexpectedly broke down. German reunification followed shortly in October 1990, which led to the complete replacement of familiar social and economic structures in the eastern part of Germany.

At the same time, throughout Central and Eastern Europe, communist governments collapsed and societies were in transition. This instability contributed to approximately one million foreigners and ethnic Germans immigrating to Germany in 1992, half of whom sought asylum. Though Germany is 25 times smaller than the United States, that year it took in the same number of immigrants and asylum-seekers as the United States. This dramatic influx, combined with a recession and high unemployment in Germany, created tension and anti-foreigner feelings in some segments of German society.

With the most lenient asylum laws in Europe, Germany faced insupportable immigration growth. As a result, in 1993 Germany brought its laws closer to those of other Western nations. Even with these changes, the following year Germany still accepted around 50% of all asylum-seekers in Europe, "by far the highest load of any European country," according to the U.N. High Commission for Refugees.

Popular Support for Foreign Residents

Currently Germany has a resident foreigner population of 7.3 million, or nearly 9% of the total population of 82 million.

At the height of right-wing violence, after an arson attack in Moelln had killed three Turks in November 1992, over 3 million Germans joined candlelight marches in Berlin, Munich, Hamburg, Bonn and many other cities to show their support for foreigners living in Germany.

In May 1994, one year following the arson attack that killed five Turks, a monument was dedicated in Solingen to the memory of the victims.

Each year, discussions, displays, films and other cultural events are held during Woche des auslaendischen Mitbuergers (Week of Foreign Fellow Citizens). Events across the country focus on the contributions to society made by individuals from various cultural backgrounds now living in Germany. Begun in 1983 as the successor to an earlier one-day event held annually since 1970, the celebration is sponsored by trade unions, church groups, civil rights organizations and political groups.

Right-Wing Organizations and their Followers

In 1999, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz) recorded 51,400 Germans with extreme right-wing leanings, .06% of the population and a decrease of 2,200. Of these extremists, 9,000 are classified as militant right-wingers (mostly Skinheads) with a potential for violence.

These figures include the right-wing parties the Republikaners (REP), which claimed 14,000 members in 1999, and the German People's Union (DVU), which claimed 17,000. Both parties lost roughly 1,000 members during the year. Neither the REPs nor the DVU has ever had members elected to the Federal Parliament. In the October 1998 federal elections, the REPs received 1.9% of the vote and the DVU got 1.2%.

Government Countermeasures

Ban on Right-Wing Parties and Groups

According to the Basic Law (Germany's constitution), political parties and groups that seek to impair or abolish the free democratic basic order, or endanger the existence of the Federal Republic of Germany, are unconstitutional. Only Germany's Constitutional Court has the power to ban such organizations.

The Republikaner Party, the German People's Union and the Nationale Partei Deutschlands (NPD) are under close surveillance by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution.

Police and Legal Efforts

On December 1, 1994, Germany's "Crime Prevention Laws" took effect. Targeted in large part against extremist organizations and anti-foreigner violence, the legislation introduced new criminal laws and toughened existing penalties. In addition, in certain cases it expedited criminal prosecution. The legislation effectively:

- * broadened the definition of incitement of violence and racial hatred to include statements defaming whole groups and minorities,
- * outlawed the use of any Nazi-like flags, badges, uniforms, slogans or gestures, (the use or replication of actual Nazi material or gestures has been banned since 1945)
- * increased penalties for crimes involving personal injury,
- * established special anti-extremist police units,

- * set up a central communications network to coordinate information on suspects' movements,
- * broadened legal grounds for holding suspected and repeat offenders.

In Germany it is a federal crime punishable by up to five years in prison to deny the Holocaust's existence. Since 1945, the production and distribution of Nazi memorabilia and propaganda, including leaflets, posters and newspapers, have been illegal in Germany.

American Neo-Nazi Ties

German officials estimate that American organizations produce and send 85% of all the outlawed neo-Nazi material found in Germany. In December 1993 and again in October 1995, Germany urged the U.S. to prevent American right-wingers from publishing and sending anti-Semitic and neo-Nazi material to Germany. A prominent German human rights group, Project "Against Forgetting -- For Democracy," is also active on this issue. In October 1996, it appealed to the U.S. to intervene and asked U.S. authorities to provide legal assistance to German investigations of American neo-Nazi activities in Germany.

In August 1996, German courts convicted American neo-Nazi Gary Lauck of inciting racial hatred and disseminating illegal propaganda in Germany. Lauck, who for about 20 years had been the main supplier of propaganda to German neo-Nazis, was sentenced to four years in prison. Since his arrest and conviction, the amount of neo-Nazi propaganda reaching Germany from the U.S. has dramatically decreased. Germany deported Lauck to the United States in 1999.

Lauck had based his operations in Lincoln, Nebraska. In December 1994, the city of Lincoln, Nebraska, passed a resolution initiated by the German-American Heritage Society that condemned Lauck's ideas and disassociated the city from any neo-Nazi activities. The governor of Nebraska did the same on the state's behalf in June 1995.

Education and Open Information Policy

Teaching about Nazism and the Holocaust is compulsory for all types of schools at all education levels.

The federal and state governments have joined with trade unions, corporations and sports associations to educate the public about the dangers of intolerance. The governments sponsor seminars and public discussions designed to foster a government-citizen partnership to address this important issue. Teachers, parents' groups, community liaison representatives and school paper editors are all involved in a variety of educational and public awareness campaigns aimed at reaching young people. Students work with classroom materials that explore the causes of right-wing activity, xenophobia and violence and ask them to reflect on ways to combat such negative behavior.

The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution and the Federal Criminal Police Office collect and publish on a regular basis comprehensive data about hate crimes and other forms of right-wing violence in Germany.

Note: all statistics provided by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution

http://www.germany-info.org/newcontent/np/np_3d.html