

Editorial

Right-wing extremist and xenophobically motivated violence has been an issue for the German public not only after the so called “Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund” (National Socialist Underground, NSU) was – coincidentally – uncovered in November, 2011. For since the early 1990s hardly any other topic has been so much investigated, researched, published and discussed. But still, uncovering an racist motivated terror group which had committed a series of bank robberies and murders (most of all of migrants of Turkish origin) without being detected came as a shock for politics and society in Germany. How was it possible that over years the German domestic intelligence service with its network of informers (German: “V-Leute”) as well as the police authorities had no knowledge whatsoever of the activities of this group? Why was it that professional observers kept on saying that in Germany there was indeed right-wing motivated violence but no right-wing terrorism? How did the group succeed with operating underground since 1999 and committing serious criminal offences without being hindered? No less than four parliamentary enquiry committees in Dresden, Erfurt, Munich and Berlin pursued these and other questions. The now existing reports contribute essentially to uncover what happened; in particular it becomes obvious why in this case the security authorities failed so blatantly.

“Knowledge makes us educationally handicapped”, this is what expert Günther Schicht stated during the final session of the German Bundestag in May, 2013. If this was true, we would not need any scientific research – nor the here presented edition. What he probably meant is that a narrow sight prevents understanding. For, as soon as there develops an overall dominating view – no matter if it concerns the investigation or the interpretation of facts – the fringes around the established focus become ever more blurred. Concerning this terror group itself, however, there are still many unanswered questions – and it is by no means safe to say that the NSU trials at the Oberlandesgericht Munich against the only surviving member of the “trio” as well as against a number of (alleged) supporters will produce reliable answers to all questions.

Also this special edition may at best provide a contribution, by placing the existing pieces of information about NSU terror into a broader context of politically motivated violence and working out their particular features. They stand out from the great number of violent offences with mostly xenophobic background happening every year, most of them being committed without detailed planning and strategic calculation but not seldom in a blind rage and with utmost brutality. Instrumental-purposeful action, on the other hand, is typical only for a small number of these violent offences – to which, however, we should pay particular attention, as this is where a dynamic of violence going as far as to right-wing terrorism is most likely to unfold.

The sociologist Christopher Busch identifies the particularity of NSU terror in an unusual combination of both types of violence, those Michael Kohlstruck calls “hot” (emotional and full of hatred) and “cold” (cold-bloodedly calculating). On the one hand, Busch states, the series of attacks was planned over a long period and carried out with much refinement from the underground, on the other hand the perpetrators seemingly picked up their victims at random from the group of migrants, that is they did not care much about particularly symbolic targets and, furthermore, they did nothing to communicate directly that they were the perpetrators. After all, the film produced by the terrorists was taken to the public by the surviving partner, Beate Zschäpe, only after the death of the two alleged main perpetrators, like a kind of legacy. Busch himself considers his theses preliminary, as we may suppose that in the coming months and years our image of the NSU will become more consolidated. In this context it may well be that assumptions which have already been considered safe will be questioned again.

The political scientist Matthias Mletzko from Mainz moves on much safer ground in many respects. His contribution makes impressively clear that in the xenophobic and NS-prone scenes there have for long been right-wing terrorist tendencies but that they have been neglected in many cases by professional observers. By the example of two groups from Saxony, the “Skinheads Sächsische Schweiz” and “Sturm 34”, he works out differences and common traits. Both groups developed a group structure based on work division, they planned their actions in “nationally liberated zones”, equipped themselves appropriately and committed violent actions against ideologically defined groups of enemies. For both groups it is possible to provide evidence that they were influenced by the hate medium of right-wing rock music with its eliminatory leitmotifs. Even leadership members were active with relevant bands. Other than in the case of the “Skinheads Sächsische Schweiz”, with “Sturm 34” the dynamic of violence was essentially influenced by multiple offenders. More detailed insight concerning this group of offenders may be expected from a currently running research project of the Hannah Arendt Institute.

The “Skinheads Sächsische Schweiz” and “Sturm 34” were banned and dissolved before right-wing terrorist tendencies could become more consolidated. Why did this fail in the case of the NSU? Was it because one underestimated right-wing terrorist tendencies and analysed the dangers insufficiently? The political scientist Michail Logvinov from Dresden summarizes the lessons taught by the NSU case and in his contribution, by way of case examples from the history of right-wing terrorism in post-war Germany and works out terrorism-relevant indicators. He places particular attention on four dimensions of analysis: actors, ideologies, reference groups as well as framework conditions, and he attributes dangerous indicators to each of them. They again serve as projection screens for the analysis of possible and plausible sub-indicators which might shed light on the threat posed by right-wing extremism in view of its relevance

for terrorism. In the focus there is the question of under which conditions and constellations the threshold towards terrorist violence might be passed. Right-wing extremist actors with the described qualities – as is the main thesis – require particular attention by both security authorities and applied extremism research.

Not seldom, analyses of right-wing motivated offenders have underestimated the role of ideology. By his contribution, Jan Buschbom of the Berlin-based Violence Prevention Network makes a point and pursues the question of how violence and ideology are related to each other. Based on cultural-philosophical studies on the nature and effect of myths, the author grasps ideology as a secondary myth, to describe the deeply affective rooting of the ideological narrative within the personality structures of right-wing violent offenders as well as among right-wing violent groups. Then he confronts these considerations with the biographies and offences of three right-wing oriented violent offenders and discusses them. All three offenders show highly problematic family constellations, however when it comes to selecting their victims at the latest, the monocausal reference to socio-biographic factors is insufficient. For ideology provides a horizon of interpretation, an “equivalent of the peer group”; accordingly these young people behaved exactly as it was predetermined by those narratives of concepts of enemies and violence as they are predominant among ideologised groups.

This special issue is completed through a contribution by the political scientist Uwe Backes from Dresden, who attempts to grasp the entirety of politically motivated criminal offences by their development and interaction dynamic. He points out to an often neglected fact: hate criminality motivated by xenophobia and racism, as it has been in the focus of the public debate for a number of years, and rightly so, is not at all restricted to the “right-wing/right-wing extremist” realm. Indeed, attacks on members of minorities make a considerable number of the violent offences registered every year. But also in the “left-wing/left-wing extremist” phenomenological field there is no lack of ways of “fighting objective enemies”. In general, and other than suggested by the word, according to the general opinion among “hate violence” we may also count offences requiring detailed and extended planning and being committed in a cool and rational way. Thus, hate criminality and terrorism may walk hand in hand. The NSU may be supposed to be a particularly alarming example.

On the other hand, those offences which are committed as a reaction to individual behaviour belong to a different category than hate criminality. Confrontational violence, as it is committed by “right-wing” offenders vs. “left-wing” offenders and vice versa, goes beyond the limits between individual and group-oriented violent action. Its share has considerably grown in the past decade. Furthermore, a new line of conflict deserves our attention, which has added to the well-known confrontation of right-wing vs. left-wing: that is “Islamists/Salafists” vs. provocatively behaving “Islamisation” critics. Furthermore, on both

fronts policemen in the context of demonstrations become increasingly the target of attacks whose brutality seems to be growing.

Notwithstanding all necessary distinctions and nuances, all kinds of politically motivated violence require our attention. Even if, for the time being, at no time the consolidation of democracy in reunited Germany has been affected by politically motivated violent offences, still this is a serious challenge for domestic security. And that not only in the interest of certain groups of society which become victims of discrimination and violent attacks but most of all also because the peaceful debate among diverging opinions, convictions and interests is so to speak the heart of a free society.

Uwe Backes and Michail Logvinov