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Germany to create a centre for protection against 'right-wing terrorism'

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This came as a response to the publication of information in the media concerning the operation of a gang of three people, so far unidentified by the police, who murdered nine immigrants and one policewoman between 2000 and 2007. According to the media reports, members of this gang (who have been labelled by German politicians and the media as 'right-wing terrorists') were under police watch in the late 1990s, and counter-intelligence had its agents inside their circles.

On 18 November, after a meeting of the federal and local internal affairs and justice ministers and the heads of the police and prosecution authorities, Hans-Peter Friedrich, the German Minister of Internal Affairs, promised a centre for protection against 'right-wing extremism' would be created, as will a central database containing a list of individuals linked to the 'radical right'. This came as a response to the publication of information in the media concerning the operation of a gang of three people, so far unidentified by the police, who murdered nine immigrants and one policewoman between 2000 and 2007. According to the media reports, members of this gang (who have been labelled by German politicians and the media as 'right-wing terrorists') were under police watch in the late 1990s, and counter-intelligence had its agents inside their circles. This gave rise to a debate on the ineffectiveness of control of 'right-wing extremism' in Germany.

Commentary

- The decision to create a database and the centre for protection against 'right-wing extremism' means that the concept of the minister of internal affairs, Hans-Peter Friedrich (CDU), who did not want to upset the existing counter-intelligence structures, has won. The federal minister of justice, Sabine Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger (FDP) demanded a deeper reform and a stronger centralisation of the services responsible for internal security.

- The case of the extremists and the criticism of the activity of counter-intelligence also provided another pretext for all parliamentary groupings to demand the imposition of a ban on the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD), even though the members of this gang had no links to this party. However, a ban on the NPD is highly unlikely as this would make its members inclined to act outside the public domain and deprive counter-intelligence of its so far strong ability to infiltrate these circles. Pursuant to the German

constitutional court's ruling as of 2003, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution would have to withdraw its agents from the party's leadership while the banning procedure would be in place.

- One can doubt whether the proposed solutions will enable a more effective combating of the threat posed by the less numerous extremist groups, which are very difficult to infiltrate. Nevertheless, the database and the centre being established will certainly streamline the communication between secret services, which are poorly coordinated in Germany (in addition to the federal counter-intelligence office, counter-intelligence institutions operate in each federal state). The database may be modelled on a similar record concerning Islamic terrorism, which includes information collected by dozens of various German services.