

German police arrest suspects on charges of plotting a terrorist attack

On 29 April, officers from the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) detained three people in Düsseldorf and Bochum of Moroccan and Iranian origin, including two German citizens, suspected of Al-Qaeda membership and plotting a terrorist attack in Germany. One of the detainees reportedly spent some time in spring 2010 at a terrorist training camp in Pakistan, where he was instructed to carry out a bomb attack in Germany. The group was spotted partly owing to intelligence information from the USA and intensified activity from the German services, who have been on yellow alert since November 2010.

The operation of this group and the fact that it has been broken up has to be considered in three dimensions. Firstly, the threat of 'domestic terrorism' and terrorist attacks carried out by young immigrants living in Germany, who are operating both as part of organised Islamist groups (as in this case) and independently (as was the case with the terrorist who killed two US soldiers in March this year at Frankfurt airport), is still real. Secondly, German law enforcement agencies are successfully infiltrating Islamist circles. For example, the centralisation of the prosecution of crimes of a terrorist nature in Germany and the addition of preventive operational techniques to the powers of the BKA have brought positive effects. Thirdly, the recent detentions prove that effective co-operation exists between German and US agencies. The group was spotted partly owing to information from the USA obtained as a result of the analysis of the details of airline passengers travelling between the EU and third countries.

However, the issue of powers vested in German law enforcement agencies for combating terrorism is being used by German political parties in current political disputes. Christian Democrats have presented the detentions as an argument for extending the period of application of the 'anti-terrorist regulations', which have been gradually granting more powers to German prosecution authorities since 2001. The reasonableness of the application of these regulations is to be revised at the beginning of 2012. The coalition party FDP is among those who oppose the extension of the application of these regulations. <jus>