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Germany: fear of terrorist attacks

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In a confidential report quoted by the daily *Die Welt* on 13 January, the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) warned that there may be copycat terrorists ready to carry out attacks similar to those seen in France. Although the situation of Muslims in Germany is different from that in France, information about the assault in Paris has contributed to Germans feeling an increasing sense of threat. This in turn is exacerbating the existing political and social tensions provoked by fears of radical Islamists. In Dresden demonstrations against the "Islamisation of Europe" have been held every Monday since the end of October 2014 and they are attracting an increasing number of participants. The present context has brought about a situation in which the organisers of the Pegida demonstrations have become the only ones who adequately assessed the threat from radical Islamists. In consequence of this, they pose a serious problem to the parties represented in the Bundestag. On the one hand, politicians of the ruling coalition are calling into question the assessment of the situation presented by this anti-Islamist movement. On the other hand, they are urgently submitting draft laws aimed at raising the security level.

What is Pegida?

Beginning on the 20 October 2014 every Monday in Dresden demonstrations have been organised by Pegida, an informal association (though a registration application has already been submitted). Its name is an acronym formed from the name *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the West). The first demonstration, organised on 20 October 2014 via Facebook by Lutz Bachmann, a 41 year old owner of an advertising agency, was attended by 160 people. The demonstration held on 15 December was attended by 15,000 people and the one on 12 January by 25,000. The events are known as "Monday demonstrations" (*Montagsdemonstrationen*) in reference to the demonstrations held from 1989 in East Germany, during which demonstrators chanted the slogan "*Wir sind das Volk*" – "We are the nation" and demanded political reforms. The organisers have made clear declarations that they are not racists or extreme right sympathisers. Bachmann himself, charged with drug trafficking, claims he is a "disappointed CDU voter". Indeed, the 19-point Pegida manifesto includes nothing which could be interpreted as being xenophobic or intolerant. The association opts for a change and improvement in the asylum, immigration and integration policies, an increase in financing the police, the introduction of direct democracy and the defence of the Judeo-Christian culture of the West. Pegida is against the genderisation of the language, supplies of arms to the PKK (Germany does in fact supply arms and

equipment to the Kurds in northern Iraq but not to the PKK), all manifestations of political and religious radicalism and the perpetuation of immigrant ghettos in Germany. During Pegida demonstrations the spectrum of chanted slogans is even broader – they range from demands for all politicians to resign to appeals to Vladimir Putin to save Western civilisation.

According to its manifesto, Pegida is part of other movements protesting against the "Islamisation" of Germany (for example Pro-Köln or Hooligans gegen Salafisten). The Pegida manifesto is also supplemented by demands connected to topical issues such as: the war in Syria, street clashes involving Kurds and Salafists in several German towns, the appearance of young people wearing reflective vests with "Shariah Police" (*sic!*) written on them on the streets of Wuppertal, and the failings of the asylum system. Pegida is trying to respond to the growing sense of alienation and threat from Islam in the country. According to opinion polls 17.5% of Germans declare that they feel alienated in their own country because of Muslims (opinion poll by *Die Welt* from 10 September 2014). 57% of those surveyed consider Islam a threat and 61% believe Islam to be a religion incompatible with Western civilisation (*Religionsmonitor* on 8 January 2015). There are between 3.8 and 4.3 million Muslims in Germany, constituting approximately 5% of the population in Germany. Although the majority of the Muslims in Germany declare their attachment to constitutional values, a serious influx of people who sympathise with Salafism (a radical movement in Islam) has been observed in recent years. In 2011 the number of Salafists in Germany was estimated at 2,000. At present the figure stands at 7,000.

A political problem

Politicians have thus far been ambivalent in their reaction to Pegida. While Angela Merkel has said that there is no place in Germany for people who preach xenophobic views, the CSU has would like the demonstrators' message to be listened to. The Justice Minister Heiko Maas (SPD) has termed Pegida a "disgrace for Germany" and Sigmar Gabriel, the Vice-Chancellor, Economy Minister and the head of the Social Democrats, has opted to talk about people disappointed with the political system. Following the assault in Paris the largest political parties are trying to make up for their previous negligence and are precluding a further increase in support for Pegida. Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Joachim Gauck are trying to avoid perpetuating the rhetoric which equates Islam with terrorism. On 12 January, during a meeting with the Turkish prime minister, Ahmet Davutoglu the head of the German government repeated the statement made by former German president Christian Wulff that "Islam is part of Germany". On 9 January President Gauck argued that neither where someone comes from nor their religion determined whether one belonged to German society but rather the "recognition of the constitution, the rule of law and humanity". Sigmar Gabriel has called on all political parties to participate in a counter-march to the Pegida demonstration – in defence of the freedom of speech and against terrorism. The CSU in turn has called on Pegida to suspend its demonstrations. It is worth noting that the reaction of the Alternative for Germany (AfD), labelled "Eurosceptic", to Pegida is not unequivocal. Whereas Alexander Gauland, the head of the AfD in the in Brandenburg expressed his support for the movement, Bernd Lucke, an MEP and the AfD's party leader cautioned against a shallow stigmatisation of all followers of Islam. The

difference in opinions between party leaders reflects the conflict between the two wings of the AfD that has been underway for some time. Results of opinion polls indicate that actions undertaken by German politicians are overdue and ineffective and the attacks in Paris have led to increased support for Pegida. According to the latest survey published on 8 January by the *Bild* 29% of Germans believe that the association is right (up from 22%). The number of the people who fear terrorist attacks has also risen from 49% to 74%. The German government is in a difficult situation. On the one hand, it has to talk openly about the threat from radical Islamists in order to mobilise ordinary citizens to be more vigilant. On the other hand, this fuels the sense of threat and xenophobic feelings, which may lead to an escalation of tensions and clashes between Muslims and, for example, Pegida followers. It could, furthermore, lead to an increase in support for the political parties which promote anti-immigration slogans.

A genuine problem

The confidential report by the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) quoted by the media on 13 January confirms that fears of attacks are justified. It is not the first warning that has been issued by the German services in recent months. The present situation is more dangerous, though, since the assault in France may, according to the BKA, serve as an example for radical Islamists in Germany. The evidence for this is supposedly provided by social media posts threatening Germany. According to data from the Federal Ministry of the Interior, there are 260 people in Germany who might carry out attacks. They are in part former Islamic State militants who have returned from the war in Syria. The Federal Ministry of the Interior has been trying for many months to develop regulations which would make it impossible for German citizens to travel abroad to fight in wars. It is an element of a broader action to keep Salafists who could pose a threat under surveillance and to neutralise them pre-emptively. This work has now been accelerated. On 14 January the German government adopted a draft law developed by the interior minister Thomas de Maizière which will make it possible to temporarily retain identity cards (and issue a replacement) of people who are suspected of planning to go to war. Furthermore, de Maizière has appealed to Germans to be vigilant and would like to resume the discussion about returning to the retention of personal data. Heiko Maas (SPD), the justice minister, is opposed to this idea, and has announced the establishment of his own “anti-terrorist package” which will above all prevent radical organisations from raising funds. The CSU goes furthest in its demands as it calls for the detention of potential terrorists.

The assault in Paris has forced German politicians to take a stance and to accelerate actions with regard to issues which have been festering for a long time with solutions being delayed. An increase in support for movements which promote such slogans as Pegida and, consequently, increased pressure from public opinion on the government, will make it necessary for the grand coalition to discuss the integration of immigrants and changes in the immigration law.