

Germany accuses Russia of attempted attack at Leipzig Airport

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On 1 September, the German government for the first time attributed the attempted attack at Leipzig/Halle Airport on 4 August to Russia (see '[Armed drone found at Leipzig Airport](#)') and announced a series of retaliatory measures. Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt (CSU) supported the allegations by noting that the technical components, explosives and ignition mechanisms used were familiar to the German security services from previous Russian hybrid operations and from the war in Ukraine. The operation itself also required considerable technical expertise and preparation.

Foreign Minister Johann Wadepuhl (CDU) announced a series of retaliatory measures. These include closing Russia's Consulate General in Bonn, terminating the agreement concerning the Russian House in Berlin, implementing stricter entry controls for Russian citizens, advocating within the EU for additional Russian individuals and entities to be added to the sanctions list, increasing pressure on Russia's 'shadow fleet', maintaining civilian and military support for Ukraine, and introducing 'additional measures in the intelligence sphere that will not be disclosed publicly'.

Russia dismissed the German allegations as a fabricated provocation and announced that it would respond to Berlin's measures. Vladimir Putin asserted that Chancellor Friedrich Merz was acting against Germany's interests, attributing this stance to Merz's low public approval ratings and the domestic political situation in Germany.

The German government has not disclosed all the evidence. Consequently, attributing responsibility to Russia represents both an intelligence assessment and a political decision. Germany views the Leipzig events as an escalation of Russian operations and has resolved to toughen its response.

Commentary

- **The government's announcement represents a qualitative shift in Germany's approach.** Berlin publicly identified Russia as the state responsible for the incident, described it as part of the hybrid war being waged against Germany and announced diplomatic consequences. However, Germany has not invoked Article 4 of the NATO Treaty or declared reciprocal offensive measures, leaving options open for further action. According to media reports, consultations on the incident are due to take place on 2 September. Berlin anticipates broader EU and NATO measures against Russia, particularly with regard to sanctions and countering hybrid operations. Simultaneously,

German authorities expect that Moscow may carry out further operations, including those intended to cause substantial damage rather than merely demonstrate its capabilities or intimidate. On 1 September, an electrical substation near the Jänschwalde coal-fired power plant in Brandenburg was damaged. Several improvised explosive and incendiary devices that had failed to detonate or ignite were discovered at the site. It has not yet been established who was behind the incident.

- **Implementing Germany's strong political declaration will present significant challenges.** Closing the Russian consulate in Bonn is the most straightforward measure, as it falls within the remit of the federal authorities. As regards the Russian House in Berlin, the German Foreign Office acknowledged on 10 August that its status is governed by two bilateral property agreements that link the institution's operations to those of the Goethe-Institut in Moscow. Consequently, any action by Berlin is likely to provoke Russian retaliation against Germany's cultural presence in Russia. Addressing the 'shadow fleet', implementing additional sanctions, and enforcing visa restrictions are even more complex. The effectiveness of such measures depends largely on EU-level decisions and enforcement, as well as cooperation from other countries. Germany may pursue a more assertive stance during allied negotiations on these issues.
- **The government's decision to publicly attribute responsibility to Russia may affect the final days of the election campaign in Saxony-Anhalt and is more likely to deepen polarisation than to alter voter preferences.** The AfD currently leads with approximately 42% support, compared to 22% for the CDU, and openly criticises Germany's support for Ukraine (see '[Wszystko jest możliwe. AfD idzie po władzę w Saksonii-Anhalt](#)'). Alleging Russian security service involvement in the attack on Leipzig/Halle Airport enables the CDU and the federal government to shift the debate towards the threat to Germany's immediate security, in contrast to the AfD's pro-Russian stance. This is all the more significant because the German security services had previously pointed to Russian disinformation operations ahead of the state elections, primarily targeting the AfD's rivals. However, the effect could be the opposite, as the AfD is already leveraging the situation to support its narrative of government escalation towards Russia and is mobilising voters who distrust the federal authorities, the security services and the policy of supporting Ukraine. Consequently, the incident is more likely to intensify the campaign than to change its dynamics, reinforcing the divide between advocates of 'security and resilience towards Russia' and proponents of 'de-escalation and distrust of federal policy', a distinction that is especially pronounced between the CDU and the AfD in eastern Germany.