
GERMAN AFD: DECISION TO MONITOR PARTY 'BIZARRE', LACKS SUBSTANCE

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17.01.2019

EurActiv (16 January 2019)

The German intelligence service will review all public actions taken by the far-right AfD party and its officials and if suspicions of contempt for democracy and human dignity are confirmed, the party may be subject to continuous active monitoring. EURACTIV Germany reports.

From today, the far-right AfD (Alternative for Germany) will be listed as a review case by the German intelligence service. Over the coming months, the authority will document party officials public speeches, internet entries and social media activities, investigating contempt for democracy and human dignity.

Should the suspicions be confirmed, the AfD could be actively monitored by the German intelligence service, Thomas Haldenwang, the president of the Federal office for the protection of the constitution, said in Berlin on Tuesday (15 January).

AfD party congress: Back to a 'Europe of nations'

At a party congress, the leaders of the far-right AfD (Alternative for Germany) adopted a manifesto calling for changes in the EU, ranging from the abolition of the European Parliament to Germany leaving the eurozone and the common EU security and foreign policy. EURACTIV Germany reports.

The AfD's board was outraged at the decision, saying the accusations were unsubstantiated and bizarre and that legal action would be taken.

Roland Hartwig, the head of the protection of the constitution working group in the AfD, said investigators were empty-handed and the process was politically motivated. They have been examining for months now. This shows that the information gathered against us is not sufficient in any way to continue monitoring us, Hartwig said.

AfD parliamentary group leader Alice Weidel spoke of a political conspiracy against both the party and the former head of the intelligence service, Hans-Georg Maaßen, who lost his post in late 2018 after making questionable comments about the right-wing uprisings in Chemnitz, eastern Germany.

This decision would not have been possible with Mr Maaßen. That's why he had to leave, that's why stories about hounding were engineered, Weidel said.

Germany: The deep fall of Hans-Georg Maaßen

The chief of Germany's Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, Hans-Georg Maaßen, will have to take his leave, in a potentially unsettling development for Germany's struggling ruling coalition. Chancellor Angela Merkel wants to let him go. EURACTIV Germany reports.

Christian Lindner from the liberal FDP supported the monitoring of the AfD but warned that there cannot be the impression that the parties want to get rid of an irritating competitor through the security authorities.

As a review case, the AfD is now subject to general monitoring by the German intelligence service. There cannot be investigations against specific individuals, nor can data be saved or intelligence service people used for surveillance.

The situation is different for the youth organisation Junge Alternative (Young Alternative) and the extreme right splinter group Der Flügel (The Wing), which are now both cases of suspicion. Intelligence service resources can now be used to investigate these groups.

Der Flügel, led by the nationalist Björn Höcke, believes it is impossible for some foreigners to integrate in Germany for biological reasons and calls for a curfew for male migrants.

In the case of Der Flügel, all of the signatories of its founding declaration are generally part of the observed circle. The question of whether this means that co-signatory Alexander Gauland is also under observation was reportedly only a theoretical option so far.

This situation is not entirely new for the AfD. The Landesverband (state association) of Thuringia has been listed as a review case since September 2018. The Junge Alternative is also already being monitored by federal state offices in Bremen, Baden-Württemberg and Lower Saxony.

Contacted by EURACTIV Germany, Haldenwang explained that the process of examining comments made by the AfD had already started in spring 2018. By the autumn, the intelligence services state authorities had compiled 1,070 pages of material for investigation.

However, the AfD's current inclusion as a review case does not mean that the party will automatically be upgraded to a case of suspicion by the intelligence service. Instead, it will depend on whether the authority finds AfD officials guilty of showing contempt for the rule of law and human dignity.

This move could also influence the party's election campaign for the European elections. Over the weekend of 12-13 January, the AfD included the call for the European Parliament to be abolished in its election manifesto.

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