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## The Unholy Alliance of Neo-Nazis and Football Hooligans Germany's New Right

By SPIEGEL Staff

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**The riots in Cologne at the end of October show there is a new danger on Germany's extremist right. Neo-Nazis and football hooligans have teamed up to go after Islamist Salafists. Many are wondering why officials didn't recognize the development sooner.**

Hours after their coup, the rabble rousers were still reveling in their unexpected success. One hooligan going by the nom de guerre "Bo Ne," happily posted: "We made it into the news around the entire world. Russia, Turkey, Switzerland, Spain, France -- first goal achieved!"

It was a view shared by almost everyone in the four closed forums belonging to the group called Hooligans gegen Salafisten (Hooligans against Salafists). With more than 3,000 members, the network is a loose association of neo-Nazis, nationalists and football rowdies -- and their posts made it clear that they didn't think they were being monitored. One regretted not having brought an axe to the demonstration to "destroy all of Islam." Bo Ne and others, however, were totally satisfied. Germany, he wrote, has now seen "what it means to deceive a people for 70 years."

And: "Cologne was just the beginning."

The rally took place on the last weekend in October and saw almost 5,000 demonstrators, right-wing extremists and football hooligans march through Cologne, many of them clearly looking for trouble. Riled up by the right-wing rock band Kategorie C (which sings lyrics like: "Today they are slitting the throats of sheep and cows, tomorrow it may be Christian children"), they filled the Cologne city center with their hate. Tourists and passersby got out of their way.

By the time the march came to an end, 49 police officers had been injured, a police van had been flipped over and plenty of other property had been damaged. Cologne police quickly assembled a special investigative unit made up of 36 officers. State prosecutors say that 32 suspects have now been identified and fully 72 investigations have been opened.

### **Unexpected Phenomenon**

But questions abound as to how such a thing could have happened. And fear about what comes next is also widespread. Almost as soon as the violence in Cologne had come to an end, dates for further demonstrations elsewhere in Germany began circulating.

The phenomenon is an unexpected one. Thousands of hooligans appear to have left their football clubs of choice behind in favor of uniting against a common enemy: the presumed danger of Islam. In addition, they have joined forces with neo-Nazis and other racists. Nobody, it would seem, thought that such an unholy alliance was possible.

Political reaction was prompt. Lorenz Caffier, the interior minister of the northern German state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, quickly placed the issue on the agenda for the next meeting of state interior ministers. His counterpart from Lower Saxony, Boris Pistorius, demanded the creation of a special police task force. Meanwhile, representatives of football clubs around the country expressed shock and dismay at the violence on display in Cologne.

Yet despite the hurried reactions, the phenomenon is one that has been developing for some time now. Since February of 2012, security officials have had solid evidence that traditionally adversarial hooligan groups were establishing ties and drifting to the right-wing fringe. That month, the Borussenfront -- a group of right-wing rowdies that had its apex in the 1980s -- invited representatives of other hooligan groups to a "cross-club exchange" in a farmhouse in the Rhineland.

Members of 17 "firms," as they call themselves in imitation of their British counterparts, came to the gathering from across the country, many of them aging veterans of past battles. They drank plenty of beer and reminisced -- a kind of class reunion for thugs.

### **The 'New Hunters'**

One participant recalled that the Borussenfront representatives vented about the left-wing Ultras, complaining about their publicity stunts, such as those seeking to combat racism in Germany's football stadiums. And in the end, those gathered at the meeting agreed to "cut the Ultras down to size." Towards the end of the evening, they gave their new group a name: Gnu Honnters, a

malapropism of "New Hunters." In a group photo, four of those present can be seen giving the Hitler salute.

Since then, left-wing Ultra groups in Aachen, Dortmund, Duisburg, Braunschweig, Düsseldorf and elsewhere say they have been threatened, chased down and beaten by hooligans. Some Ultra groups, such as that in Aachen, have pulled back in the face of the new threat.

The hooligans' success in the battle against the Ultras resulted in a flood of new right-wing members. Meetings began attracting attendees who had previously been active in the "Nationalen Widerstand" (National Resistance) or in now-banned groups such as the "Kameradschaft Aachener Land."

By the beginning of 2013, according to security officials, the Gnu Honnters boasted 300 members. They went to Kategorie C concerts and took part in football tournaments, such as the "Swastika Cup" in Karlsruhe, where the hooligans met up with neo-Nazis from Duisburg, Dortmund and Baden-Württemberg.

Germany's mainstream football clubs claim that they knew nothing of the development. Many officials believed that hooliganism, once widespread in Germany, had essentially died out -- despite the fact that street battles continued to take place outside of stadiums every weekend.

The example of Dortmund shows that, for an extended period, the phenomenon was not taken seriously enough. Indeed, right-wing extremist hooligans had even managed to find jobs within the club's own security service. It was only a year and a half ago, when Thilo Danielsmeyer, a social worker with the Borussia Fanprojekt, was beaten up during an away match in Donetsk, that the club woke up. Two men had attacked Danielsmeyer in the restroom, yelling "Dortmund will stay right-wing!"

The Borussia Dortmund club responded with anti-racism campaigns, film projects and posters in addition to imposing stadium bans on some right-wing agitators. "That's how you demonstrate to the right-wing that they are unwanted in football," says Danielsmeyer. But he was concerned about the fact that those shut out by the club were apparently being recruited by right-wing extremists. In Dortmund, one neo-Nazi invited them to a joint training session at his boxing gym.

### **Even More Radical**

Lawmakers also dragged their feet in the face of the development. After a report about the right-wing infiltration of fan groups appeared on SPIEGEL ONLINE in early 2014, the Left Party in German parliament filed an official enquiry. The response is a document of cluelessness. Knowledge about hooligan networks? "None." About operations targeting anti-racist fan groups? "None." About cooperation between hooligans and right-wing extremists? "None." Officials, however, promised to "attentively follow" further developments.

Meanwhile, the neo-Nazi-hooligan network became even more radical, with some of them waiting for an opportunity to steer the group in a political direction. Developments in Iraq and

Syria were exactly what they were looking for, particularly given the proliferation of pro-Islamic State Salafist groups in Germany.

The hooligans adopted their new name -- Hooligans gegen Salafisten, or Hogesa -- and hoped to receive widespread popular support with their fight against Islamist extremists. One forum member posted in a chat room: "The grannies will love us."

Early this year, the right-wing hooligan alliance confronted their newfound enemy for the first time, with up to 200 of them showing up at appearances by the notorious Salafist preacher Pierre Vogel in Mönchengladbach and Mannheim. One of the demonstrations was called by the neo-Nazi hooligan Christian Hehl, who was voted into the Mannheim city council in the summer. During this period, rocker gangs -- yet another group of men with a predilection for violence -- were also part of the Hogesa inner circle.

In short, officials should have known what was coming prior to the orgy of violence seen in Cologne. But they continued to ignore the new right-wing alliance. Just several weeks ago, the police unit responsible for combatting football violence in Germany reported that they knew of only 400 "right-wing motivated" football hooligans in the country. Not long later, the German Interior Ministry commented that "thus far, an alliance between hooligans and right-wing extremists " cannot be observed. Domestic intelligence officials were convinced that only a handful of right-wingers belonged to Hogesa.

### **'Germany for the Germans, Foreigners Out!'**

But at the march in Cologne, groups of demonstrators intoned well-worn neo-Nazi chants, such as "Germany for the Germans, foreigners out!" and "We are the national resistance!" It was clear that only a small spark was needed to trigger a greater conflagration. According to an internal police report, it came at 3:49 p.m. in the form of several people wearing jerseys of the Istanbul football club Galatasaray and showing the right-wing marchers the middle finger while firing off fireworks. The situation escalated immediately and ultimately the mob began assaulting the police.

Some officers were even forced to draw their weapons when confronted by masked rioters armed with knives. The police report leaves no doubt as to the mob's political views: The participants, it notes, were "predominantly members of the hooligan fan scene as well as members of the right-wing network."

An internal inquiry has now been started in an effort to determine how officials could have been so misguided in their pre-riot assessments. One investigator believes that the Hogesa network was able to develop in a vacuum that existed between two government agencies. The police are responsible for stadium security and for violence-prone fan groups, but are largely uninterested in their political leanings. Domestic intelligence agents, on the other hand, monitor extremist groups, to which hooligans have not traditionally belonged. "They cleverly took advantage of the niche that we made available," the investigator said.

Still, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution -- as Germany's domestic intelligence agency is known -- had had Hogesa on their radar since the beginning of the year and had an inkling that something was afoot. Prior to the Cologne march, federal intelligence officials warned their state counterparts in Düsseldorf that the hooligan scene was able to mobilize large numbers of people. The number of demonstrators, they said, would likely exceed official expectations of 1,500. They also warned of possible violence.

At the event, some 1,300 police officers found themselves badly outnumbered, confronting 4,800 demonstration participants. "The situation was very clearly underestimated," says André Schulz, head of the police association BDK. Ralf Jäger, interior minister of North Rhine-Westphalia, disagrees, though he does admit that the vast majority of those attending the demonstration were unknown to security officials. A working group in the state criminal office has now been tasked with determining if Cologne saw a "gigantic flash mob," as German Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière believes, or if the country is faced with a powerful new right-wing group.

### **A Low Profile**

The search for those behind Hogesa could be a difficult one. The organizers of the Cologne demonstration immediately went underground and have shunned publicity. A YouTube video was released in which a masked speaker advises those looking for additional information to visit the Hogesa website.

The site was registered under a postal address in the town of Hennef, in North Rhine-Westphalia, and a mobile phone number was also provided. The man who answers the phone says he can help contact those who run the Hogesa site, but also says that interviews must be paid for. Demonstrations, he notes, are expensive: The stage in Cologne alone cost €450.

Dominik Roeseler, deputy state leader for the right-wing populist movement Pro-NRW, likewise sought to keep a low profile following the demonstration. He is the one who registered the demonstration before withdrawing from the steering committee under pressure from Pro-NRW leadership.

Andreas K. was the only one of the organizers of the Cologne demonstration who was willing to speak with us. The owner of a tattoo parlor, Andreas K. is known in the scene as "Kalle Grabowski" and played an important leadership role in Hogesa. He is in his late 40s, wears a heavy gold chain and his arms are covered in tattoos. At previous Hogesa demonstrations in Dortmund and Cologne, he was one of the keynote speakers and led participants in chants of "We don't want any Salafist pigs!"

But now he says he intends to turn his back on Hogesa. The network has become too large, he complains, and impossible to lead. "I don't want to be responsible for riots and violence," he says. "You can't change anything with violence." He also claims that he is not a right-wing extremist. "I have never had anything to do with Nazis," he insists.

## **Greater Popularity**

It is tempting to believe that he isn't alone with his concerns and that some within Hogesa were surprised by their own violence. But investigators are skeptical. One investigator says he can see no reason why the hooligan-neo-Nazi network would want to stand down: "Cologne was a success for them and it will certainly generate greater popularity for them."

The right-wing scene seems to be eagerly anticipating the next opportunity to take on the hated "system" under the cloak of anti-Salafism. The Islamophobic blog "Politically Incorrect," for example, has written enthusiastically about what it is calling "The Miracle of Cologne." One contributor even seemed to veer into homo-eroticism, writing about the "real men" who took part in the march, the "strapping guys who showed their faces for our German fatherland."

Die Rechte, a neo-Nazi splinter group that was also present in Cologne, praised Hogesa, saying the group had "impressively established itself."

The neo-Nazi political party NPD, which suffered painful recent defeats in state elections in Saxony and Thuringia, is now hoping to find new support among hooligans. "The potential is huge," wrote a senior NPD official in a statement. "The movement has the stuff of a real mass movement." Another party official, Ronny Zasowk, says: "Now is the time to take advantage politically."

Conspicuous in their silence, by contrast, has been Hogesa's declared enemy: the Salafists. But what might happen were they to seek out confrontation with the hooligan right-wingers? A discussion held on the Facebook page of an influential Salafist last week provided a hint. Someone posted, in reference to the demonstrators in Cologne: "I would have cut the throats of each and every one of them."