

# Germany: Who are the “Saxon Separatists?”

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In the first week of November, a large contingent of 450 German police and domestic intelligence officers, as well as Polish and Austrian police, raided 20 different properties and arrested eight members of the far-right group ‘Saxon Separatists’ on suspicion of being members of a terrorist organisation. It is no coincidence that the group’s abbreviation, SS, is identical to that of the Nazi Schutzstaffel.

The arrests took place in and around the East German cities of Leipzig, Dresden, neighbouring Meissen and in the Polish part of Görlitz (Zgorzelec), where the alleged leader of the group Jörg Schimanek was arrested by Polish police. Schimanek is currently in custody awaiting extradition to Germany. In Austria, searches were carried out in the Vienna area and in the district of Krems-Land. One of those arrested was injured by a gunshot to his jaw during his arrest, but his life is not in danger. It is still unclear whether the injury was caused by his own hand or by the police.

According to a statement by the German prosecutor general, the group had set up paramilitary structures and held military type exercises at an abandoned airfield near Brandis, among other places. The aim was to use armed force to conquer areas in the state of Saxony and other regions on a ‘Day X’ in order to establish a state and social system based on National Socialism. Subsequently, ‘undesirable groups of people were to be removed from the area, if necessary through ethnic cleansing.’

Oriented towards the right-wing extremist scene in the US, the Saxon Separatists referred to this phase internally as ‘Boogaloo.’ The so-called ‘Boogaloo Boys’ were part of the far-right mob that stormed the US Capitol in 2021 to establish a dictatorship under Trump. The right-wing extremists who tried to kidnap and murder Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer in 2020 also considered themselves part of the ‘Boogaloo Boys’ movement.

Unlike other far-right terror groups, such as the Reichsbürger network led by Prinz Reuss, the Saxon Separatists are not accused of actively planning a coup, but rather of preparing for what they see as an inevitable

civil war. ‘In particular, they practised urban warfare, the use of firearms, night-time marches, and patrols,’ the public prosecutor’s office said in a statement.

Registered and unregistered firearms, ammunition, silencers, cartridges for Kalashnikov assault rifles and the casing of a mortar round were confiscated by the police. In addition, the group had obtained military equipment such as camouflage suits, helmets, gas masks and protective vests. They travelled to neighbouring Poland or the Czech Republic for shooting practice.

A look at the background of those arrested, all of whom are between 20 and 30 years old, reveals they are not an isolated phenomenon, but have emerged from established neo-fascist structures developed over a long period of time.

For example, 25-year-old Kurt Hättasch, who was arrested in Grimma, is the faction leader on the local city council of the far right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party. He is also a board member of the district association and treasurer of the Saxon Junge Alternative (Young Alternative). Two others arrested, Kevin Richter and Hans-Georg Pförtsch, were also part of the AfD district association. As the taz newspaper has documented, several members of the SS group posed with the Thuringian AfD chairman Björn Höcke during the 2022 election campaign.

Hättasch worked for AfD member of the state parliament Alexander Wiesner and was also connected to Götz Kubitschek’s far-right ‘Institute for State Policy’ in Schnellroda. His wife is the daughter of Thomas Sattelberg, the leader of the ‘Skinheads Sächsische Schweiz’ organisation, which was banned in 2001. Sattelberg and his daughter travelled to Ukraine in 2019 to network with the far-right Azov Battalion. Since 2017, he has been running the ‘Kraftquell’ project in Pirna, Saxony, together with the Norwegian neo-Nazi Eirik Ragnar Solheim. The Kraftquell project serves as a meeting place for neo-Nazis, and its accommodations are intended to enable Ukrainian Azov fighters and their families to take a holiday in Germany, according to

Schimanek. In 2019, the international secretary of the far-right National Corps, Olena Semenyaka, gave a lecture there, according to the weekly *Die Zeit*.

The international connections of the Saxon Separatists extend even further. For its leader Jörg Schimanek and his brother Jörn Schimanek, paramilitary far right extremism is practically a family tradition. Their father Hans Jörg Schimanek Jr. was active in the Austrian military sports group VAPO around Gottfried Küssel and, like their grandfather Hans Jörg Schimanek Sr., close to the far right Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ). Heinz-Christian Strache, the former FPÖ vice chancellor, was also a member of the VAPO military sports group for a time. Immediately after German reunification in 1989/90, Schimanek Jr. emigrated to East Germany, where his sons were born.

Jörg Schimanek, who is still in prison in Poland, is being defended by Martin Kohlmann, a lawyer who is well known within the far-right scene. Kohlmann is leader of the far-right regional party 'Freie Sachsen' (Free Saxons). Jörn Schimanek travelled to Budapest for the 'Day of Honour' this year, which for many years has been a central rally for the far-right scene across Europe.

The rise of the AfD, the neo-Nazi riots in the East German city of Chemnitz and the subsequent defence of the rioters by the former head of the domestic intelligence service, Hans-Georg Maaßen, outraged millions of people. But the question arises, why are the fascists back seven decades after the fall of the Third Reich? This cannot be understood without examining the sharp changes which have taken place in politics, the state apparatus and intellectual life.

Other SS members, such as Norman T. and Hans-Georg Pförsch, have ties to the neo-Nazi Third Way organisation, the Scandinavian Nordic Resistance Movement and the Thuringian gang Knockout 51. Karl K. is connected to the youth organisation of the former NPD, the Young Nationalists.

In common with other right-wing extremist networks, the Saxon Separatists were infiltrated by a wide variety of secret services and police authorities. According to research by NDR, WDR and *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, an FBI confidential source was the first to have online contact with Jörg Schimanek. Since the beginning of this year at the latest, the German intelligence agency is also said to have had its own confidential source in the network's Telegram group and was able to read its messages.

Given the group's extensive cross-border connections, it is completely implausible that the German authorities

were unaware of it before the FBI's tip-off. This is all the more likely, given that Hans-Georg Pförsch, from Dresden, is a far-right extremist well known to the police. He was already tried in Leipzig in 2020 and 2021 for using the symbols of unconstitutional organisations and in 2022 for incitement. He was acquitted in the first trial and the second trial was dropped.

When it comes to right-wing extremists, German law enforcement agencies and the German judiciary are notoriously "blind in the right eye," i.e., overlook the far right and concentrate on persecuting leftists. The case of Franco A. makes this clear. Although his right-wing terrorist connections and activities were public knowledge, the Frankfurt Higher Regional Court did not try him until 2019 on the instructions of the Federal Court of Justice, and finally sentenced him to five and a half years in prison in 2022. In the most notorious case in recent German history, i.e., the eight-year trial of the neo-Nazi NSU terrorist group, the court in Munich was careful not to address the true extent of the groups far-right structures and connections.

Far-right networks have proliferated in eastern Germany since the 1990s. The skinheads of Saxon Switzerland, the NSU, Revolution Chemnitz, the Freital group and Saxon separatists are not isolated cases like the Schimaneks, who emigrated from Austria.

Many neo-Nazis realised that the restoration of capitalism in the east of Germany offered a favourable opportunity. The glorification of social cuts as a necessary evil, the revision of history according to a national, anti-communist narrative and the accompanying blossoming of a reactionary culture offered ideal opportunities to build up far right and neo-Nazi organisations under the benevolent eyes of right-wing officials in the police and secret services. The fact that these groups are now increasingly active is the responsibility of the ruling class as a whole. It is moving further and further to the right. With its policies of war, xenophobic agitation against refugees and social cuts, it is creating the political and ideological breeding ground for far-right terror.



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