

“Shadow army” and military terrorism in 21st century Germany.

The 2017 *Der Tag X* conspiracy¹

“Ejército en la sombra” y terrorismo militar en la Alemania del siglo XXI.

La conspiración de *Der Tag X* de 2017

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Abstract

In 2017, a conspiracy known as *Tag X* (Day X) was uncovered within the German *Bundeswehr* (Armed Forces). This operation had been articulated from the embryo of a possible 'shadow army', supported by paramilitary organisations, and its aim was to seize power through the use of violence and terror *Der Tag X* (The X-Day). This dynamic would culminate in the implementation of “ethnic cleansing”, the elimination of “internal enemies” and the establishment of an authoritarian state. Our thesis is that the origin of this military conspiracy is closely

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associated with a set of political, social, economic and cultural transformations that have taken place since the last decade of the twentieth century and that have created a favourable situation for the rise of the extreme right in Germany and “legitimised” right-wing extremists to intervene in the political decision-making process.

We have used two main types of sources for our work. On the one hand, primary sources, consisting of decrees on tradition in the *Bundeswehr*, and parliamentary investigations and intelligence reports on right-wing extremism in the *Bundeswehr*. On the other hand, bibliographical and periodicals, which cover the main events connected with the *Tag X* conspiracy.

Keywords: *Bundeswehr*, Far Right, Armed Forces, Military Interventionism, Terrorism.

Resumen

En 2017 se descubrió en el seno de la *Bundeswehr* (Fuerzas Armadas) de Alemania una conspiración conocida como *Tag X* (Día X). Esta operación se había articulado a partir del embrión de un posible “Ejército en la sombra”, apoyado por organizaciones paramilitares, y su objetivo era tomar el poder mediante el uso de la violencia y el terror *Der Tag X* (El Día X). Esta dinámica culminaría con la puesta en marcha de una “limpieza étnica”, la eliminación de los “enemigos internos” y el establecimiento de un Estado autoritario. La tesis que mantenemos es que el origen de esta conspiración militar está íntimamente asociada a un conjunto de transformaciones políticas, sociales, económicas y culturales que se han producido desde la última década del siglo XX y que han creado una situación favorable para el ascenso de la extrema derecha en Alemania y “legitimado” a militares de esta ideología para intervenir en el proceso de toma de decisiones políticas.

Para desarrollar nuestro trabajo, hemos utilizado fundamentalmente dos tipos de fuentes. Por un lado, las primarias, formadas por los decretos sobre la tradición en la *Bundeswehr*, y las investigaciones parlamentarias y los informes de los servicios de inteligencia sobre el extremismo de derechas en la *Bundeswehr*. Por otro, las bibliográficas y hemerográficas, donde se recogen los principales acontecimientos vinculados a la conspiración de *Der Tag X*.

Palabras-clave: *Bundeswehr*, Extrema derecha, Fuerzas Armadas, Intervencionismo Militar, Terrorismo.

Introduction

On 7 December 2022, the world’s media reported that 3,000 police officers under the orders of German Federal Public Prosecutor Peter Frank had arrested 25 members of the extreme right-wing organisation *Reichsbürger* (Citizens of the Reich) who had been preparing for months for *Der Tag X* (The X Day), the date on which they would destroy the German democratic system. The press release issued by the organisation read³:

The arrested suspects belong to a terrorist organisation founded by the end of November 2021 at the latest and which has set itself the goal of overcoming the existing state order in Germany and replacing it with its own form of state, the outlines of which have already been drawn up. The members of the organisation are aware that this intention can only be realised by using military means and violence against the representatives of the state. This also includes the commission of murder. The defendants are united by a profound rejection of state institutions and the free democratic basic order of the Federal Republic of Germany, which in the course of time has led them to take the decision to participate in their violent elimination and to carry out concrete preparatory acts to this end.

This terrorist organisation was allegedly led by Prince Heinrich XIII of Reuss, who wanted to head a new government and who had contacts in Russia. According to his family, with whom he has not been in contact for three decades, he is “a partially disturbed man who holds erroneous views on the basis of conspiracy theories”. His second-in-command and head of the armed wing of the conspiracy was the 60-year-old retired military officer Rüdiger von P., a former commander of a paratrooper unit. Also among those arrested was Birgit Malsack Winkemann, a politician for the far-right populist party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD), a Berlin judge who has extensive knowledge of the Reichstag and other parliamentary buildings due to her former position; a soldier of the *Kommando Spezialkräfte* (Special Forces Command, KSK) –the elite of the Bundeswehr and the unit with the most right-wing extremist members in the 21st century–; military reserve officers; and a former policeman who was responsible for the security of Jewish communities in Lower Saxony before his suspension⁴. Their aim was to take over the *Bundestag* (German Parliament) and to achieve this they had created the embryo of a “Shadow Army” by contacting members

³ *Festnahmen von 25 mutmaßlichen Mitgliedern und Unterstützern einer terroristischen Vereinigung sowie Durchsuchungsmaßnahmen in elf Bundesländern bei insgesamt 52 Beschuldigten. Date: 7-12-2022. <https://www.generalbundesanwalt.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/aktuelle/Pressemitteilung-vom-07-12-2022.html?jsessionid=057060F2E00A7E2FF85EA7ED328ABE23.intranet241> [in successive notes: Festnahmen...]*

⁴ *El País*, 7-7-2022.

of the *Bundeswehr* (German Armed Forces) and the police forces of the *Länder* (Federal States)⁵:

The group's recruitment efforts focused primarily on members of the Federal Armed Forces and the police. To achieve this goal, four meetings were held in the summer of 2022, at least in Baden-Württemberg, at which the accused Rüdiger v. P., among others, promoted the group and its goals. In November 2022, defendants Rüdiger v. P., Marco v. H., Michael F. and Thomas M. specifically attempted to recruit police officers for the association in northern Germany. In October 2022, members of the "military wing" scouted Bundeswehr barracks in Hesse, Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria in order to inspect their suitability to accommodate their own troops after the coup.

After seizing power, they would establish a transitional military government that would negotiate Germany's relationship with the victorious powers of World War II: the United States, France and the United Kingdom.

Although the news sent shockwaves through German and Western public opinion, it should not have come as much of a surprise to Prosecutor Frank, who five years earlier had already broken up a similar conspiracy, albeit more dangerous in its scope.

In 2017, a conspiracy also known as *Der Tag X* was uncovered within the *Bundeswehr*. This operation was led by a group of officers who, like the one dismantled in 2022, had begun to create the embryo of a possible shadow army, supported by paramilitary organisations, and maintained relations with AfD politicians. They also intended to seize power through the use of violence and terror, and then unleash a process of "ethnic cleansing" and elimination of "internal enemies", culminating in the establishment of an authoritarian state.

In 2019, Wolfram Wette, a renowned German historian, told a seminar on military history⁶:

The systematic downplaying of the problem by the *Bundeswehr* [Armed Forces] leadership has meant that politicians and civil society are still unable to get a clear picture of the extent of right-wing extremism in the *Bundeswehr*. Some *Bundeswehr* media outlets, such as *Taz* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, have therefore taken on the difficult task of using their limited investigative capacities to dig into the inner workings of the *Bundeswehr* and find out to what extent there are radical nationalists, right-wing extremists, neo-Nazis and terrorists who may have established right-wing extremist networks or are even in the process of creating a secret "shadow army".

⁵ *Festnahmen...*

⁶ Wette (2019): 1

The discovery of the *Tag X* conspiracy and the words of the German professor captured four parallel dynamics that are at the root of the crisis of liberal democracy. These processes are manifesting themselves in the Federal Republic of Germany as a whole, but also in other Western countries.

The first was the infiltration of the extreme right into the armed forces and police forces. In the 1990s, authors such as Heinz-Ulrich Kohr, Detlef Bald, Ludwig Knorr and Paul Schäfer warned of the significance of this process. Later, authors such as Sven Bernhard Gareis, Peter-Michael Kozielski and Michael Kratschmar, Peter Dudek and Hans-Gerd Jaschke or Wette developed this thesis in their research⁷. However, this dynamic is not unique to Germany. A similar situation is developing in some North American states⁸.

The second is the existence of paramilitary militias made up of right-wing extremists. On the proliferation of these organisations, Barbara Walter has recently written: “Modern civil wars start with vigilantes just like these-armed militants who take violence directly to the people. Militias are now a defining feature of conflicts around the world”⁹. Although her work focuses on the United States, this assessment can be extended to Germany, where armed paramilitary groups also exist.

Third, the creation of a “Shadow Army”. This term refers to clandestine military and paramilitary units, organised and armed by officers of the armed forces. Their functions include the “surveillance” of the political decision-making process, and the actions they can carry out include acts of terrorism: political assassinations, sabotage, etc. It is a type closely linked to German history, specifically to the *Schwarze Reichswehr* (Black Army), a “Shadow Army” that existed between 1919 and 1923¹⁰.

Fourth, the intervention of the military in the political decision-making process. This dynamic has been studied by Alfred Vagts, Samuel E. Finer, Gwyn Harries-Jenkins and Charles Moskos, Morris Janowitz and Samuel P. Huntington¹¹. This phenomenon is not a manifestation of German exceptionalism, but of the multifaceted changes produced in Western European countries since the end of the 20th century and has also manifested itself in Spain as a consequence of the attempted secession of Catalonia and in France because of the problems arising from jihadist terrorism and immigration¹². However,

⁷ Kohr (1993); Bald (1998); Knorr (1998); Schäfer (1998); Gareis et alli (2001); Dudek y Jaschke (2015); Wette (2017).

⁸ Marche (2022).

⁹ Walter (2022): 8.

¹⁰ Carsten (1973): 159, 168-169, 315; Kane (2002): 52-59, 66.

¹¹ Vagts (1958); Finer (1969), Harries-Jenkins y Moskos (1984); Janowitz (1967); Huntington (1957).

¹² “73 mandos retirados del Ejército firman una carta al Rey que asume el discurso de Vox”, *El País*, 29-11-2020; “‘Pour un retour de l’honneur de nos gouvernants’: 20 généraux appellent Macron à défendre le patriotisme”, *Valeurs Actuelles*, 11-4-2021; “Signez la nouvelle tribune des militaires”, *Valeurs Actuelles*, 11-5-2021.

the fact that differentiates Germany from these two European countries is that military interventionism is linked to a defined ideology, National Socialism, which has always been present in a sector of the *Bundeswehr* since 1945, and to an instrument, terrorism.

The thesis that we will develop in this research is that the *Der Tag X* conspiracies of 2017, as well as that of 2022, are intimately associated with a set of political, social, economic and cultural transformations that have taken place since the last decade of the 20th century and that have created a favourable situation for the rise of the extreme right in Germany and “legitimised” military members of this ideology to intervene in the political decision-making process.

In order to develop our work, we have mainly used two types of sources. On the one hand, primary sources, consisting of decrees on tradition in the *Bunderswehr*, and parliamentary investigations and intelligence reports on right-wing extremism in the *Bunderswehr*. On the other hand, the bibliographical and periodicals, which Wette considers to be key sources for understanding the conspiracy.

Finally, the research is divided into three sections. In the first, we analyse the *Bunderswehr* since the end of the 20th century. In the second, we focus on the growth of the German far right in the 21st century and the causes that have fuelled this dynamic. Finally, in the third, we explain the *Tag X* conspiracy of 2017.

The Bundeswehr in the 21st century: A past that does not pass away

On 18 March 2018, the Ministry of Defence published the decree *Die Tradition der Bundeswehr. Richtlinien zum Traditionsverständnis und zur Traditionspflege* (Tradition in the Armed Forces. Guidelines on the understanding and cultivation of tradition)¹³. This legal regulation – the adoption of which was preceded by intense debates that included the discovery of the *Tag X* conspiracy – repealed the previous decree *Richtlinien zum Traditionsverständnis und zur Traditionspflege in der Bundeswehr* (Guidelines on the Understanding and Cultivation of Tradition in the Armed Forces) issued on 20 September 1982¹⁴, and embodied the definitive

¹³ *Die Tradition der Bundeswehr. Richtlinien zum Traditionsverständnis und zur Traditionspflege*, <https://www.bmvg.de/resource/blob/23234/6a93123be919584d48e16c45a5d52c10/20180328-die-tradition-derbundeswehr-data.pdf> [in successive notes: *Die Tradition...*]

¹⁴ *Richtlinien zum Traditionsverständnis und zur Traditionspflege in der Bundeswehr*, https://augengeradeaus.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/20170517_Traditionserlass_1982_Wortlaut.pdf [in successive notes: *Richtlinien...*]; *Synopse der Traditionserlasse der Bundeswehr vom 20. September 1982 und vom 28. März 2018*. <https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/557654/bdd4aaf6240c43008ccf1e038a98c134/WD-2-035-18-pdf-data.pdf>

revision of German military history and tradition that had begun in the last decade of the 20th century.

Since the creation of the *Bundeswehr* in 1955, successive governments in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) have sought to strike a balance between a traumatic past and the need to maintain and enhance the effectiveness of German military units during the Cold War. They did not hesitate to use generals such as Hans Speidel –Supreme Commander of NATO’s Central European Ground Forces from 1957 to 1963– or admirals such as Bernhard Rogge, who achieved their rank fighting in the Second World War, to rebuild the *Bundeswehr*¹⁵. Moreover, both the 1982 decree and the one that preceded it, passed on 1 July 1965¹⁶, while not mentioning the *Wehrmacht* as a source of German military tradition, explicitly recognised the *Bundeswehr*’s link to officers who had led the opposition against Adolf Hitler and did not reject the memory of those who had not committed war crimes. Thus, for example, a class of destroyers built between 1966 and 1970 were given the names *Rommel* (Army), *Lutjens* (Navy) and *Mölders* (Air Force). The same approach was followed for numerous military bases. In addition, the 1982 decree stated that “in the cultivation of tradition, one must also remember the events in which soldiers participated in the political renewal, which contributed to the emergence of a citizenry and pointed the way to a free, republican and democratic Germany”¹⁷. This paragraph implicitly referred to the Prussian army reformers of the early 19th century: Field Marshals Gerhard von Scharnhorst, August von Gneisenau or Ludwig von Boyen.

However, after the end of the Cold War and the completion of the unification process in 1991, the German political elite decided to make a definitive break with the past. The cause was the revival of right-wing extremism among significant sectors of the civilian population and officialdom¹⁸:

The assessment of the suspected cases reconfirmed that the misconduct of soldiers reflects influences and thoughts that we also find in our society today. Right-wing extremism and xenophobia are not a special problem of the *Bundeswehr*.

¹⁵ J. Corum (2011). This decision was strongly criticised by the communist journalist and politician Lorenz Knorr (1998).

¹⁶ *Bundeswehr und Tradition*, https://augengeradeaus.net/wpcontent/uploads/2017/11/Traditionserlass_Bw_1965.pdf

¹⁷ *Richtlinien...*, 4.

¹⁸ *Beschlußempfehlung und Bericht des Verteidigungsausschusses als 1. Untersuchungsausschuß gemäß Artikel 45a Abs. 2 des Grundgesetzes zu dem auf Antrag der Fraktion der SPD am 14. Januar 1998 gefaßten Beschluß des Verteidigungsausschusses, sich zur Abklärung tatsächlicher und behaupteter rechtsextremistischer Vorfälle in der Bundeswehr als Untersuchungsausschuß gemäß Artikel 45a Abs. 2 des Grundgesetzes zu konstituieren*, 296, <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/13/110/1311005.pdf> [in successive notes: *Beschlußempfehlung...*]

Thus, according to the Ministry of Defence, these attitudes manifested themselves in the last decade of the 20th century mainly as propaganda offences: Hitler salute, Nazi slogans, Reich war flag with swastika, Wehrmacht belt, songs, National Socialist symbols in soldiers' quarters, xenophobic and racist statements, etc.¹⁹. In some barracks "tradition rooms" were even discovered which documented an uncritical closeness to the *Wehrmacht* with their exhibits: Helmets, belts, etc., although the *Richtlinien* forbade it. At the *Franz-Joseph-Strauß* barracks in Altenstadt (Bavaria), paratroopers celebrated the "Führer's birthday" with Nazi flags, pictures of Hitler and the National Socialist song *Horst Wessel*. A cache of weapons was also found in the attic of a barracks. These incidents also occurred outside the military premises. Drunken soldiers of the Bonn Guard Battalion, whose job it was to train and parade at receptions for foreign political dignitaries, shouted "Gas the Jews" and "Foreigners out" on a bus, and these incidents were not confined to the army, but also extended to the navy. A naval lieutenant in the reserves delivered a racist harangue on a warship during manoeuvres in the Atlantic: "Everyone who is not an Aryan and lives in Germany must be shot or taken to the gas chamber"²⁰. To deal with these incidents, a committee was set up in the *Bundestag*²¹. But it was not very successful. In 2001, in Afghanistan, a group of KSK soldiers painted the famous "Palm Tree", the symbol of the *Afrika Korps* –the army corps under Field Marshal Erwin Rommel during World War II– on their vehicles, provoking a serious scandal that was accompanied by intense debates in parliament²².

The aim of the various cabinets that have succeeded each other in the course of the 21st century has therefore been to eradicate right-wing extremism from the *Bundeswehr* once and for all. The culmination of this policy came with the adoption of the 2018 decree. The basic idea pursued by Ursula von der Leyen as defence minister was to transfer the concept of "constitutional patriotism" defined by Rolf Sternberger and Jürgen Habermas to the military sphere²³. This approach involved rejecting any connection with the armed forces of the Second World War, as stated in the 1982 decree: "The Wehrmacht served the unjust National Socialist regime and participated in its crimes (...) In the Second World War it became an instrument of its racial policy (...) For the armed forces of a democratic constitutional state, the Wehrmacht is an institution that is not worthy of tradition"²⁴. And, in parallel, to articulate this

¹⁹ *Beschlußempfehlung...*, 90-92.

²⁰ "Rassismus. Höchststrafe für Reserve-Leutnant", *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 1-9-1997; Wette (2019): 3.

²¹ *Beschlußempfehlung...*

²² *Richtlinien...*, 8. *Ministerium wusste von Symbol auf Bundeswehr-Fahrzeug*,

<https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/wirbel-um-wehrmachts-emblem-ministerium-wusste-von-symbol-auf-bundeswehr-fahrzeug-1.849020>

²³ Sternberger (2011); Habermas (1998)

²⁴ *Richtlinien...*, 2 ; *Die Tradition...*, 6.

tradition solely and exclusively on the basis of the principles of the *Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany* (1949) and the Law on the Status of Soldiers (1955)²⁵: “Respect for human dignity, the preservation of the rule of law and international law, the exclusion of all violence and arbitrary violence and the commitment to freedom and peace”²⁶.

The content of this decree, defended by notable academics²⁷, cannot be disassociated from the social image of the military in Germany, which is not very positive. In a sociological study compared with British cadets conducted by British historian Sarah Kayss in 2014, the future *Bundeswehr* officers – all of whom come from the German student elite (*Gymnasium*)²⁸ and 36 per cent from families with a military tradition²⁹– did not hesitate to reflect the contempt they feel from the majority of their compatriots. The 88% of cadets “felt that the military is not held in high esteem by society”, with one saying that “many of my friends who work in the private sector cannot understand my decision”³⁰. Thirty-nine per cent even felt uncomfortable wearing their uniform in public because they feared they would be socially ostracised³¹.

However, this survey also revealed other interesting facts about recent German history, which clashed with what had been the policy of defence ministers since 1989. Thus, 70 per cent of future German officers had a high perception of the importance of history in their profession, and most acknowledged that their knowledge of German history was good (49 per cent) or very good (17 per cent)³². The three events to which they attached most importance were the Second World War, Reunification (1990-1991) and the First World War³³. But they added a very significant opinion on these historical processes: They had received a very restrictive and very negative view of the Second World War –focused on the Holocaust and mass terror– and of pre-1914 militarism, and a very positive view of both post-World Wars³⁴. On this fact, many cadets sounded a note of caution³⁵:

Exaggerated repetition of topics such as the Holocaust and the Third Reich in school, while it could lead to indoctrination of democracy, could potentially, as

²⁵ “Paragraph 8: The soldier must recognise the free democratic basic order in the sense of the Basic Law and defend its preservation through all his behaviour”, *Soldatengesetz in der Fassung der Bekanntmachung vom 30. Mai 2005, das zuletzt durch Artikel 5 des Gesetzes vom 20. August 2021, <https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/sg/BJNR001140956.html>*

²⁶ *Die Tradition...*, 4.

²⁷ Abenheim y Hartmann (2018).

²⁸ Kayss (2018): 60.

²⁹ Kayss (2018): 61.

³⁰ Kayss (2018): 62.

³¹ Kayss (2018): 63.

³² Kayss (2018): 91-94.

³³ Kayss (2018): 63.

³⁴ Kayss (2018): 98-101.

³⁵ Kayss (2018): 106.

a result of its wide coverage, also lead to rejection, denial or even disaffection of such topics.

This view is shared by a large section of the German public, as Mathias Heyl has observed³⁶, and was evidenced by a survey conducted in 2003 in which 61% of the population was in favour of turning the page on the Holocaust³⁷.

However, there was a larger problem as a group of academics observed in the late twentieth century, coinciding with the debate over the end of conscription. Detlef Bald observed a widening gap between the value systems of the *Bundeswehr* and the rest of society. This perception led him to fear that the armed forces could become a state within the state³⁸. For their part, Gerhard Kümmel and Stefan Spangenberg also raised the question that if the *Bundeswehr* exerted a special attraction on young people who were willing to use violence, this willingness could be seen as underpinned by right-wing extremist attitudes³⁹. More systematically, Heinz-Urich Kohr examined the question of how political orientations and attitudes towards the *Bundeswehr* were connected. According to his findings, based on data from a survey of 833 young people between the ages of 16 and 18, the armed forces were at risk of attracting right-wing extremists. This possibility led him to warn of the consequences of establishing a professional army⁴⁰:

For the *Bundeswehr*, as for any other army, the group, the camaraderie, the “small combat community” is especially important; the values and virtues that are espoused above all in the elite and combat units have much in common with the values and virtues that young right-wingers value and stand for. There is therefore a danger that the voluntary *Bundeswehr* will become an attraction for young people who are socially counted among the “losers of modernity” (...) rather right-wing authoritarian and nationalist.

The German historian feared a repetition of the same dynamic as during the Weimar Republic (1919-1934): The armed forces were built, following the mandate established by the Treaty of Versailles (1919), with volunteer soldiers, dominated by recruits of conservative or extreme right-wing ideology: “The Reichswehr of the Weimar Republic was not, as is well known, a guarantor of democratic legitimacy and its institutions”⁴¹. Significantly, his assertions have been fully realised, especially with regard to the elite units.

³⁶ Heyl (2003): 189-209.

³⁷ Braunthal (2009): 61.

³⁸ Bald (1998): 277-288.

³⁹ Kümmel and Spangenberg (1998).

⁴⁰ Kohr (1993): 3.

⁴¹ Knorr (1998): 57.

From these studies it can be deduced that the lack of understanding generated by guilt for a past that has not passed –linked to grandparents and great-grandparents– together with an uncritical view of history, the conservative nature of the military profession, social disrepute and the proliferation of extreme right-wing soldiers in its ranks, can generate an ideal dynamic for the emergence of coup attitudes within the *Bundeswehr* that lead some of its members to want to intervene in the political decision-making process⁴². However, two other factors are essential for this dynamic to become a reality: the existence of causes that legitimise military intervention and the favourable attitude of a sector of the population towards it.

The German far right: Was it always there?

In the conference cited above, Wette, referring to journalists who investigate military issues, stated that the idea of “the military as a ‘reflection of society’ is less true today than ever before”, adding a warning: “Soldiers are potentially a much greater threat than a civilian on the extreme right” because they have access to weapons and are trained in their use, unlike civilians⁴³. This is an incomplete thesis because while it is true that there is a significant difference between the danger posed by a trained professional and a civilian, the former always need the support of a section of the latter to intervene in the political decision-making process, especially when it is carried out in violent ways⁴⁴.

After the Second World War, voting for extreme right-wing parties was stigmatised in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and they had little electoral success. Richard Stöss’s initial major study showed that, with the exception of the *Deutschen Reichspartei* (*German Reichspartei*), these organisations had little impact on German political life⁴⁵. After 1980, other parties achieved some success at the regional and local level, be they nationalist conservatives such as *Die Republikaner* (*The Republicans*, REP) or extreme right-wing parties such as the *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (*National Democratic Party of Germany*, NPD) or the *Deutsche Volkunion* (*German People’s Union*, DVU). But they were of a short-term nature⁴⁶.

⁴² Muñoz Bolaños (2021): 434.

⁴³ *Rechtsextremismus...*, 1.

⁴⁴ Muñoz Bolaños (2021): 436.

⁴⁵ This party had a presence in the Bundestag in the elections of 1949 (18), 1953 (15) and 1957 (17), but never exceeded 4% of the vote. Stöss (1980): 107-114.

⁴⁶ Husbands (2020): 145-168; Braunthal (2009): 43-74.

However, the limited electoral presence of the extreme right before 1989 did not mean that there was no sympathy for this ideology among an important sector of the population, liberal political scientists Peter Dudek⁴⁷, Hans-Gerd Jaschke⁴⁸ and Stöss. For these scholars, beyond the relative success of the denazification process, there were residues of National Socialism among Germans that posed the most dangerous internal threat to the democratic system. This thesis was confirmed by a number of very significant surveys conducted during this period. In one in 1955, 48 percent of respondents said that Hitler had been one of the great statesmen in German history, while only 36 percent thought the opposite. In 1978, 31 per cent still answered affirmatively to a similar question, while 55 per cent answered negatively. Other –even more significant questions– revealed that only 26 per cent of respondents disapproved of the worst excesses of the Nazi regime. On this basis, Stöss calculated that in the 1970s and 1980s, Germans’ potential approval of the Nazi regime ranged from 20 to 40 per cent. Fear of this latent threat led the Federal Chancellor, the Social Democrat Helmuth Schmidt, to commission a survey in 1979–1980 by a public opinion institute to ask a representative sample of 7,000 West Germans about their views on right-wing extremism. The results indicated that 13% of the respondents –representing five million adults of at least eighteen years of age– held extreme right-wing views and that another 37% of the respondents, while voting mainly for democratic political parties, held authoritarian but not extremist views, which meant that they could be potential “bridges to the right” in a crisis situation. The percentage of right-wing extremists remained the same in 1998: 13% of the German population⁴⁹. Jaschke and Gerard Braunthal analysed and listed the factors defining this ideology⁵⁰:

- Racism: A view that Germans had uniquely superior racial characteristics continued to persist in a section of the German population⁵¹.
- Nationalism: German far-right groups embraced a chauvinistic and aggressive nationalism, similar to that propagated in the 1960s and 1970s by Alain de Benoist’s French New Right. Such nationalism was to be reflected in an authoritarian state⁵².
- Xenophobia: From the 1990s onwards, this sentiment was very prominent among supporters of the extreme right, taking the

⁴⁷ Dudek (1985).

⁴⁸ Jaschke (2011).

⁴⁹ Schubarth and Stöss (2011); Braunthal (2009): 16-17.

⁵⁰ Braunthal (2009): 2.

⁵¹ Jaschke (2011): 66-69.

⁵² Jaschke (2011): 32-63.

form of fear, hatred and hostility towards foreigners, whom they relegated to a position of inferiority. However, in Germany, as in other countries, xenophobia encompassed and is still linked to a historical pattern of prejudice and hatred towards foreigners and minorities, and towards everything that is foreign in developed societies⁵³.

- Anti-Semitism: Despite the Holocaust, right-wing extremists in Germany since 1945 have held anti-Semitic views, and even carried out attacks against Jews. These positions reflected the deep prejudices of individuals against Jews, who represent the “other”, the foreigner. This prejudice has been nurtured by the old idea of the “world Jewish conspiracy”: The secret government that controls the governments of nations, finance, business and the media around the world⁵⁴.
- Gender: In Germany, this factor has been crucial in understanding which individuals support far-right movements. Two-thirds of the voters of extreme right-wing parties are men. One of the main reasons why young women did not and do not support far-right parties has been their rejection of feminist positions. However, gender differences disappear when it comes to discriminating against foreigners and excluding them from society, partly because unemployed women often blame immigrants for their inability to get a job and right-wing extremists project their fears onto this social group by visualising themselves as responsible for rape or other crimes⁵⁵.

However, for these factors to become an electoral reality, it was necessary to add five other socio-economic, cultural, technological and political dynamics that began to be unleashed in the last decade of the 20th century and which were analysed by Ralf Havertz from a Marxist perspective⁵⁶:

- Globalisation, which brought increased levels of competitive pressure as well as growing insecurities and uncertainties for workers⁵⁷. This development was accompanied in Germany by a significant degradation of the welfare state with the *Hartz IV* reforms in the early 2000s carried out by social democratic Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, which reduced social services and put increasing pressure on welfare recipients.

⁵³ Braunthal, (2009): 9-13.

⁵⁴ Jaschke (2011): 70-76.

⁵⁵ Braunthal, (2009): 14-15.

⁵⁶ Havertz (2021): 2-3.

⁵⁷ Jaschke (2011): 7.

- The great recession that began in 2008, the origin of the euro crisis from 2009 onwards, which was solved by transfers of public funds. Many Germans responded to this situation with frustration and anger, especially against migrants and the inhabitants of European states whose economies were bailed out by European funds. This process encouraged the spread of racism, xenophobia, Euro-scepticism and social isolationism.
- The acceleration of the process of modernisation and liberalisation of German society in the first decades of the 21st century. This dynamic manifested itself in the increased protection of minorities –refugees, migrants and LGBTQ people– and an increase in the importance and presence of women in the public sphere. Sectors of German society saw these changes as a threat to their identity and traditional ways of life based on patriarchal ideals and clear social hierarchies.
- The digital revolution, with the emergence of the internet and social networks such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Snapchat and Twitter, which have altered the way citizens communicate with each other and changed political communication, which can now be more direct and unfiltered. Radical and extremist messages can now reach a wide audience, including conspiracy theories or fake news, which are extremely useful for generating outrage and mobilising people.
- The “crisis of representation” that has led many citizens to turn to populist parties because they no longer feel adequately represented by traditional parties.

However, although the factors pointed out by Havertz reflected the multifaceted dynamics unleashed since the end of the 20th century that have favoured the emergence of the extreme right not only in Germany, but also in most European countries, there is a sixth factor of a social nature that has had a major influence on this process: immigration, because it is a transversal process that affects a large part of the population of the countries of the continent. This was reflected by the French military who wrote a letter to the President of the Republic, Emmanuel Macron, on 21 April 2021⁵⁸:

This disintegration, through a certain anti-racism, has only one aim: to create unrest and even hatred among the communities on our soil. Today, some talk of racialism, indigenism and decolonial theories, but through these terms it is the race war that these hateful and fanatical partisans want. They despise our country, its traditions, its culture, and want to see it dissolved by tearing away

⁵⁸ “‘Pour un retour de l’honneur de nos gouvernants’: 20 généraux appellent Macron à défendre le patriotisme”, *Valeurs Actuelles*, 11-3-2021.

its past and its history. Thus, they attack ancient military and civilian glories with statues, parsing centuries-old words.

A disintegration which, together with Islamism and the suburban hordes, is causing the detachment of many parts of the nation and transforming them into territories subject to dogmas contrary to our constitution. However, every Frenchman, whatever his belief or non-belief, is at home everywhere in France; there cannot and must not be any town, any neighbourhood where the laws of the Republic do not apply.

These paragraphs reflected the primary ethnocentrism and ultranationalism of the military, which is based on a mystique and key concepts such as love of country and the duty to defend it against any enemy, typical of all the armed forces of Western countries⁵⁹. They are also present in the *Bundeswehr*, even more profoundly.

This set of converging processes opened a window of opportunity for a far-right populist organisation founded in 2013, AfD, to become a major parliamentary force. In 2017 it became the largest opposition party in the Bundestag with 5,878,115 votes (12.64% of the electorate) and 94 seats. In the elections held four years later, the party won 4,803,902 votes (10.34%) and 83 seats respectively. Despite this slight decline, which was partly the result of the tensions and splits the organisation had suffered in the previous period, these results marked its consolidation as a political force⁶⁰. In addition to its populist character, the AfD had another characteristic that distinguished it from the rest of the German parties: its close ties with the police and the military, to the extent that an Air Force lieutenant general, Joachim Wundrak, stood for election to lead the party in 2021. He was a joint candidate with MP Joana Cotar and represented the moderate wing of the party. They lost to the candidates from the radical wing: Alice Weidel and Tino Chrupalla⁶¹.

However, before the rise of AfD, the growing presence of the far right in German society had already manifested itself through a violent instrument: terrorism. The first manifestation of this dynamic was the actions of the *Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund* (*National Socialist Underground*, NSU), which was blamed for the murder of nine immigrants of Turkish, Greek and Kurdish descent between 9 September 2000 and 6 April 2006, the murder of policewoman Michèle Kiesewetter on 25 April 2007 in Heilbronn, the bombings in Nuremberg (1999) and Cologne (2001 and 2004), and the robbery of 14 banks⁶². Although this group was disbanded in 2011, right-

⁵⁹ Finer (1967): 28.

⁶⁰ Havertz (2021): 34-50.

⁶¹ Meisner and Kleffner (2019) : 38-42; Krause, Ludwig, “Zuletzt am Niederrhein stationiert: Ex-Generalleutnant Wundrak will die AfD bundesweit führen”, *Rheinische Post*, 5-5-2021.

⁶² Von der Behrens (2018): 84-91.

wing extremist terrorism continued to exist, its most important actions being the assassination of the Hessian politician of the *Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands* (*Christian Democratic Union of Germany*, CDU), Walter Lübcke, by the neo-Nazi Stephan Ernst; the shooting at the Halle Synagogue on 9 October of the same year by the extremist Stephan Balliet, which left two dead, and the so-called “Hanau Shootings” on 19 February 2020 by Tobias Rathjen, which left eleven dead. Angela Merkel denounced these attacks in her parliamentary speech on 27 November 2019: “These are events that make us shudder. They make us ask ourselves: What is happening in our society? And this after 70 years of the Constitution. Human dignity is inviolable”⁶³.

The existence of extreme right-wing groups willing to participate and apply terrorist tactics was a *sine qua non* condition for their military counterparts to be able to set the *Tag X* conspiracy in motion. Likewise, the existence of a section of the population sympathetic to this ideology would act as a legitimising element in the military takeover.

Der Tag X

The comrades in the Friedenstern barracks in Gotha would have known he was right-wing extremist as soon as they showered together. His tattoos were quite revealing, says Christian Weißgerber. Well, the swastikas, for example. He had one tattooed on his kneecap, one on his shoulder and one on the inside of his arm. Then there was the Thorshammer and the SS rune: “Nobody was bothered,” he says. On the contrary, the tattoos helped him start a conversation. For example, about the dangers of a multicultural society (...).

And with his superiors: “I never discussed politics directly with them,” says Weißgerber. Except with two officers. They had a weakness for conspiracy theories, so it was good to talk in the camp. There was a lot of talk about the Jewish banking families who supposedly pulled the strings at the global level from the bottom and were to blame for wars, economic crises and other misfortunes. The two officers also smiled when Weißgerber gave them his bath towel in the colours of the Reich war flag during the roll call in the barracks.

These statements by a former German soldier of National Socialist ideology⁶⁴ are descriptive of the situation in some units of the *Bundeswehr* and explain the emergence of the phenomenon known as *Der Tag X*⁶⁵:

Day X is the central goal that far-right activists work towards: On that day, according to their logic, the state order will collapse, and the way will be open

⁶³ Merkel (2021): 45.

⁶⁴ Meisner and Kleffner (2019): 185 y 187.

⁶⁵ Laabs (2021): 8.

for them to seize power themselves. Many things can trigger the collapse of the state: a natural catastrophe, a pandemic, a civil war, terrorist attacks.

Der Tag X was therefore the code name for the start of an operation that would entail: The destruction of the democratic political system, the “ethnic cleansing” of the country, the extermination of “enemies within” and the establishment of an authoritarian state. The key organisation behind this was the *Hannibal Netz* (*Hannibal Netz*), after the code name used in chat groups by a *Bunderswerh* non-commissioned officer André S., born in 1985 in Halle an der Saale, a member of the KSK and stationed at the *Graf Zeppelin* barracks in Calw (Baden-Württemberg)⁶⁶. The conspiracy –led by military personnel, but with a significant civilian component– involved members of the police of different *Länder* (*German Länder*), probably agents of the *Militärischen Abschirmdienstes* (*Military Counterintelligence Service, MAD*), and civilians and paramilitaries of extremist ideology. The military and police officers involved were mostly from the elite units of both institutions. They also included AfD members who had close contacts with AfD leaders such as Björn Höcke, Markus Frohnmaier and Jan Nolte, who belonged to the most extremist section of the party⁶⁷.

Hannibal organised the conspiracy from southern Germany in 2015. From that time on, he began to travel throughout Germany and, at the same time, contacted various neo-Nazi groups via *Telegram* chats. The situation was particularly conducive to his plans because during that year *Flüchtlingskrise 2015* (Refugee Crisis) broke out, triggered by the arrival of 800,000 Syrians in Germany⁶⁸. This dynamic was key to the rise of the AfD and to *Hannibal*’s plans. The non-commissioned officer organised different paramilitary sections of *preppers* (prepared for action), built on the *Bundeswehr*’s own division. These organisations would be responsible for setting up the takeover operation once the triggering event had taken place: *Nord* (North), *Süd* (South), *West* (West) and *Ost* (East). He also set up branches in Switzerland and Austria and re-founded an association called *Uniter* in 2016 - he had already done so for the first time in 2012 in Halle - with a postal address in Stuttgart (Baden-Württemberg), made up of soldiers, policemen and private security agents, of which he was president⁶⁹. This association grew to 2000 members⁷⁰.

The plotters had their plans well underway in 2016, coinciding with the rise of the far right that would manifest itself in the legislative elections the following year. They had stockpiled weapons and explosives

⁶⁶ Meisner and Kleffner (2019): 193.

⁶⁷ Erb, Sebastian y Schmidt, Christina, “Risiko im Reichstag”, *Taz*, 26-10-2019.

⁶⁸ Beck (2015).

⁶⁹ Tillack, Hans-Martin, “Anführer ‘Hannibal’ wünschte sich ‘radikale Führer’ und einen ‘Kampf gegen verschworene Politiker’”, *Stern*, 10-10-2019.

⁷⁰ Flade (2021): 4.

in secret caches⁷¹ and were working out the logistics for when *Der Tag X* arrived. Thus, in early 2017, four men, including two policemen and the commander of a *Bundeswehr* reserve company, met in a drinking bar on a secondary road near Schwerin. During the conversation, they discussed the warehouses where they planned to lock up their political opponents when the operation got underway. They also asked the commander if he could provide them with *Bundeswehr* trucks for this purpose in case of emergency or to overcome possible roadblocks. Even the word *Endlösung* (Final Solution) was mentioned⁷².

However, these initial plans were neutralised by the arrest on 26 April 2017 of the conspirator allegedly in charge of carrying out the action that triggered the operation: the lieutenant of the *Jägerbattalion 291* (291st Fighter Battalion) –belonging to the Franco-German brigade in Illkirchen (France)– Franco A. This officer was arrested in February 2017 at Vienna airport while picking up a gun. According to his account, he had found the pistol –*Browning* 7.65 mm, model 17– in some bushes. After picking it up, he put it in his jacket and forgot about it. The next day, when he entered the airport, he was afraid because he had it on him and decided to hide it somewhere – the bathroom– to pick it up later. The Austrian police found it there. After checking his nationality, they confiscated his mobile phone and a USB stick, took his fingerprints and sent him to Germany. Austrian investigators from the *Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz und Terrorismusbekämpfung* (Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution and the Fight against Terrorism, BVT) reported the incident to the *Bundeskriminalamt* (Federal Criminal Investigation Office –Federal Police–, BKA), the *Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz* (Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution – internal intelligence service–, BfV) and the MAD⁷³.

The German police then launched their own investigation into the lieutenant, but did not arrest him. They soon ascertained that he was an army officer stationed in Illkirchen and found out that he had been singled out for his extreme right-wing views because of a master’s thesis he wrote at the Special Military School in Saint-Cyr (France) in December 2013. This work was rejected for its racist and anti-Semitic content. An independent civilian academic, a specialist in Military History and Social Sciences, assessed the thesis on 15 January 2014, stating: “In terms of form and content, the text is not a work of academic qualification, but a radical nationalist and racist appeal, which the author tries to support in a pseudo-scientific way with some effort”. However, he was not expelled from the *Bundeswehr*, nor was

⁷¹ Meisner and Kleffner (2019): 194.

⁷² Meisner and Kleffner (2019): 191.

⁷³ Flade (2021): 1

he sanctioned. Nor was the MAD informed of this development. On the contrary, he was given the opportunity to rewrite his work⁷⁴.

Investigations into his person soon uncovered a new and very important piece of information: His fingerprints matched those of a Syrian registered with the *Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge* (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, BAMF). It turned out that Franco A. had posed as a refugee fleeing the civil war in Syria in 2016 and had applied for asylum in Germany. When interviewed by BAMF officials, he explained that his name was “David Benjamin”, that he came from a Christian family of French descent from a small village in Tel al-Hassel near Aleppo, that he had attended a French school and that he was therefore not fluent in Arabic. Thereafter he received an allowance and was placed in refugee accommodation in Bavaria. Franco A. regularly presented himself at this compound while claiming to be ill in order not to go to his barracks. With these facts, Prosecutor Frank indicted him, accusing him of planning a false flag terrorist attack, possibly the assassination of a German politician, to be interpreted “by the population as a radical Islamist terrorist attack by a recognised refugee... [which] would have attracted the attention of the population... [which] would have attracted special attention and contributed to the sense of threat”. On 27 April 2017, the BKA arrested him⁷⁵. Among the documents seized from him was a list of political opponents to be eliminated: Former Federal President Joachim Gauck –a former opponent of the communist regime in the German Democratic Republic (GDR)–, Thuringia’s Prime Minister Bodo Ramelow –*Die Linke* (The Left)–, Claudia Roth –*Bündnis 90/Die Grünen* (The Greens)–, Anetta Kahane –Amadeu Antonio Foundation⁷⁶–, anti-fascists and members of the Central Council of Jews and the Central Council of Muslims.

The information gathered in the investigation against Franco A. enabled the Federal Public Prosecutor’s Office to arrest Lieutenant Maximilian T., who was stationed in the same military unit and a member of the AfD, and his sister, as well as Mathias F., his neo-Nazi childhood friend. However, the information that led to the in-depth investigation was provided by a *Bundeswehr* reserve commander: Horst S. He had for years commanded a reserve company active in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. As commander, he had a say in who could and could not join his unit. And, it seems, he was also the military commander present at the aforementioned meeting that took place in the roadhouse near Schwerin at the beginning of 2017⁷⁷. At the time, he was under surveillance because he was part of the task force in charge of

⁷⁴ Flade, Florian, “Die völkisch-rassistische Masterarbeit des Franco A.,” *Die Welt*, 3-5-2017.

⁷⁵ Flade (2021): 2

⁷⁶ It is an anti-fascist foundation named after the young Angolan Amadeu Antonio Kiowa, who was murdered in Eberswalde by neo-Nazis on 6 December 1990.

⁷⁷ Meisner and Kleffner (2019): 191.

monitoring the G20 summit in Hamburg on 7 and 8 July. The fact that he was buying right-wing extremist literature in an online shop was very suspicious for the Franco A. investigators and he was immediately interrogated by members of the BfV. During the interview, Horst S. denied that he was a right-wing extremist and made an offer to the intelligence officers: He could provide additional information about the arrested lieutenant and the right-wing extremist groups that were preparing *Der Tag* if he was not charged. The major then informed them that weapons were being stockpiled and information on left-wing politicians was being collected, including their addresses and private photos. He also explained that Franco A. had been a member of at least one of these chat groups: *Nord* (North), *Süd* (South) or *West* (West). The subsequent investigation opened up two new avenues of action for the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office. On the one hand, it could be shown that the lieutenant belonged to *Uniter* and that he had participated in at least one of the *preppers*' meetings in southern Germany, co-organised by *Hannibal*. This meeting took place in a shooting club in Albstadt (Baden-Württemberg) and was held without the presence of mobile phones to avoid possible eavesdropping. In addition, it was also established that he visited *Hannibal* at his home, helped to organise the *Südkreuz* (Southern Cross) and bought spare parts for weapons with cash, telling the seller that they were for a special group of the *Bundeswehr*. On the other hand, Horst S.'s information led to the discovery of the *Nordkreuz* (*Northern Cross*) organisation, consisting of more than 30 members living mainly in the *Land* of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania in north-eastern Germany. It was a group of *preppers* made up of doctors, industrialists, policemen or reservists who had accumulated supplies, weapons and ammunition for when they went into action⁷⁸.

On the morning of 28 August 2017, special forces of the criminal investigation police, acting in the strictest secrecy, searched six flats and offices in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, including that of Horst S. During this raid, the officers used stun grenades and explosive detection dogs. The operation was successful. Two of the owners of the flats, a judicial police officer and a local politician, were charged with having "prepared a serious act of violence endangering the state". In addition, large quantities of weapons and more than 23,000 shells were confiscated, most of which had been obtained legally. However, others came from police depots in several German states, including some 1,900 that were traced to the headquarters of the *Spezialeinsatzkommando* (Special Police Forces, SEK) in North Rhine-Westphalia, while more than 100 belonged to the police in Saxony. They also uncovered the key figure and founder of the group, Marko G., a former

⁷⁸ Grabler, Jochen; Leiffels, Dennis, and Jolmes, Johannes, "Hitlergruß? Ermittlungen gegen Kompaniechef", *NDR Panorama*, 17-8-2017.

Bundeswehr paratrooper, who had joined the *Landeskriminalamt* (State Criminal Police Department, LKA) of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania in 1999, was a member of the SEK and had served as a police sniper and shooting instructor. In December 2019 he was sentenced to 21 months probation for violation of German weapons laws after an *Uzi* submachine gun and around 55,000 shells were found in his home during a subsequent investigation. It is still unclear today how he obtained the ammunition, as he declined to give details of its origin at the trial. Prosecutors were convinced that it could have come –including cartridges that had left the warehouses of the various *Länder* police forces– from a private shooting range in Güstrow (Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania), whose owner had links to the *Nordkreuz*. In the course of the investigation of this facility, it was discovered that many SEK and military units from all over Germany had trained there. Seventeen members of a Special Forces unit of the Saxony Police were investigated because they had allegedly given large quantities of ammunition as a gift to the owner of the camp. It was suspected that it was used as a form of payment for unauthorised shooting practice⁷⁹.

The most serious discovery, however, was a folder containing the personal details of politicians and left-wingers –names, addresses and photos– supplemented by handwritten information in the margins from the police’s own archives, which had been taken by officers involved in the *Tag X* conspiracy. This collusion between some members of the Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania police and right-wing extremists was known to the Federal Public Prosecutor’s Office prior to the raid. The Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania State Criminal Police Office was therefore not informed of the operation, while the Minister of the Interior, Lorenz Caffier (CDU), was informed only moments before the operation was launched. A clear sign that Peter Frank did not trust the men around this politician either.

The surprises for the Federal Public Prosecutor’s Office, the BfD and the MAD did not end with the discovery of this involvement. In September of the same year they received information that *Hannibal* had disposed of all the documentation he had, including a computer. When the *Bundeswehr* headquarters in Calw was ordered searched in September 2017, nothing was found. However, André S.’s superior soon afterwards reported a significant fact: He had boasted to his colleagues that he had deleted any data that could incriminate him. This attitude could only be explained if *Hannibal* had been informed beforehand that a raid was to take place at the barracks. The Federal Prosecutor’s Office suspected a MAD lieutenant colonel, Peter W., who met with André S. two days before the raid took place. However, the Cologne district court acquitted him in March 2019 for lack of evidence, although the

⁷⁹ “Munitionsaffäre erschüttert Sachsens Polizei”, *MDR* (March 31, 2021); F. Flade (2021): 3-4.

lieutenant colonel acknowledged a conversation with *Hannibal* in a hotel, in which they allegedly discussed other topics⁸⁰.

After the corresponding legal proceedings, most of those involved, including André S., were acquitted for lack of evidence and received simple fines as a sanction. The key was undoubtedly the late and unfortunate intervention of the MAD in the events - it was its responsibility since it was an operation led by active military personnel - which was unable to detect the movements of the conspirators beforehand, even though they all openly declared themselves to be right-wing extremists⁸¹. Despite this lack of competence, its head, Christof Gramm, was only dismissed on 24 September 2020⁸² and replaced by Martina Rosenberg, the first woman to head this institution. However, the most significant fact that was uncovered as the investigation progressed was undoubtedly the existence of right-wing extremists in the agencies charged with protecting the state, the government and the constitution, which posed a great threat, as these people had “access to weapons, are trained to use them and know how to avoid detection”⁸³.

Knowledge of the *Tag X* conspiracy shocked most of German society. A large group of journalists, as Vette pointed out, decided to investigate them in depth. The result was public knowledge of the facts and the main perpetrators of the conspiracy. In their investigations, however, they overlooked the analysis of three issues.

The first: Was it really possible that a non-commissioned officer in his early 30s could organise such a large operation, lead different civilian paramilitary groups, be supported by police and possibly intelligence officers, and be subordinate to *Bundeswehr* officers? The answer is no. In no army in the world would two lieutenants like Franco A. and Maximilian T. and a reserve officer like Horst S. take orders from a lower-ranking military officer. This fact therefore raises a question mark over the actual leadership of this operation.

The second: Where did the resources come from to set this conspiracy in motion? Franco A. was arrested in Vienna, but had previously bought arms spare parts in cash so that he would not receive an invoice. André S. travelled all over Germany, set up *Uniten* and organised many meetings. These actions required funds to finance them. Did the conspirators themselves provide the necessary money? There is no conclusive answer to this question.

The third: Is there any chance that a paramilitary-backed right-wing military uprising in Germany has a chance of success? The answer to this question is ambivalent. As demonstrated in December 2022, a rebellion is feasible as long as the *Bundeswehr*, the police forces and German civil society

⁸⁰ Meisner and Kleffner (2019): 195.

⁸¹ Meisner and Kleffner (2019): 196.

⁸² Gebauer, Matthias, “Kramp-Karrenbauers riskante Rochade”, *Der Spiegel*, 20-9-2020.

⁸³ Flade (2021): 3.

continue to be ready for it and, above all, as long as there is no national or even European Union pact to put an end to or at least neutralise the causes that have fuelled this dynamic, particularly the degradation of the welfare state and the immigration problem. However, if such an uprising were to take place, its chances of success are nil, as it would not be supported by the vast majority of the *Bundeswehr* and the German population. However, its consequences could be extremely serious, not only because of the lives that would surely be lost, but above all because it would greatly weaken the social consensus created since 1949 and irreversibly polarise the German population, breaking social peace in the long term.

Conclusion

In the second report of the *Koordinierungsstelle für Extremismusverdachtsfälle BMVg* (Coordination Office for Suspected Extremism Cases of the Ministry of Defence) for the year 2020, one could read: “The results confirm that extremist behaviour in the German armed forces belongs predominantly to the extreme right spectrum”⁸⁴.

The problem therefore remained. Right-wing extremism has been a constant in the German armed forces since 1919 when the *Freikorps* (Free Corps) was created and has always been characterised by a desire to unleash a wave of extreme violence against the *innere Feinde* (enemies within)⁸⁵. In recent decades it has been fuelled by different dynamics that have favoured its growth in civil society, thus creating the causes that “legitimise” a military intervention in the political decision-making process. This dynamic cannot be dissociated from the progressive weakening of the basic consensuses that allowed the construction of post-war democratic systems. It is precisely this linkage that explains why these processes are not a phenomenon unique to Germany. On the contrary, in most European countries there has been a notable electoral growth of extreme right-wing political forces and, in the specific case of France and Spain, certain military officers, including some generals, have warned of the dangers facing their respective nations, and in the case of the former, of the possibility of civil war. But in both cases they have opted for letters to their respective heads of state or public pronouncements, but never for unleashing terrorist actions like their German counterparts. The reason is

⁸⁴ *Zweiter Bericht der Koordinierungsstelle für Extremismusverdachtsfälle zur Unterrichtung der Leitung des Bundesministeriums der Verteidigung, des parlamentarischen Raums und der Öffentlichkeit* □ Berichtszeitraum 1. Januar bis 31. Dezember 2020, 5.

<https://www.bmvg.de/resource/blob/5035922/12c56d83535897f117043e86041a91c8/Zweiter%20Bericht%20KfE%20%28Final%29.pdf>[in successive notes: *Zweiter Bericht...*].

⁸⁵ Wette (2017): 421-457.

that the ideological basis underpinning the political posturing of the military in these two countries is very different from that of the Germans.

Against this backdrop, Germany's political elite has taken the decision to increase vigilance in military units in order to prevent such an operation from ever being launched. On 13 May 2020, the then defence minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer (AKK) committed herself to investigating possible extremist networks and set up a working group to reform the KSK⁸⁶. In this command, a new incident occurred when police raided the home of KSK sergeant major Philipp S., 45, in Saxony, finding weapons, ammunition and explosives hidden in the garden. As a first measure to tackle the problem posed by these forces, their 2nd company - the most problematic unit with the highest number of suspected extremists - was disbanded on 2 July 2020. "Since the disbandment of the 2nd KSK Company, no new cases with a right-wing extremist background have emerged"⁸⁷.

The reserve forces, which are also considered problematic, have also been investigated. At the initiative of the MAD, the *AG Reservisten* (Working Group on Reservists) was created, whose mission is to expel those with links to the extreme right. Since 2017, some 1,250 cases have been dealt with in 21 meetings⁸⁸.

Another measure on the table has been the possibility of reintroducing conscription, as advocated in July 2020 by the parliamentary commissioner for the *Bundeswehr* Eva Högl, a member of the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (German Social Democratic Party). For this politician, it was a "big mistake" to abolish the conscript army, as it opened the way for a volunteer force where there is a strong presence of right-wing extremists⁸⁹. This position is significant because a similar dynamic occurred during the Weimar Republic (1919-1934): The *Reichswehr* was built, following the mandate established by the Treaty of Versailles (1919), with volunteer soldiers, dominated by recruits of conservative or extreme right-wing ideology: "Die Reichswehr der Weimarer Republik was bekanntlich kein Garant der

⁸⁶ "Germany finds arms, explosives cache at special forces soldier's home", *Reuters* (May 13, 2021).

⁸⁷ *MAD-Report Jahresbericht des Militärischen Abschirmdienstes für das Jahr 2020*, 15 <https://www.bundeswehr.de/resource/blob/5094860/38f6f8cc4d2f3eb00dbdc880a103f436/mad-report-2020-data.pdf> [in successive notes: *Mad-Report...*]. On the very day of Franco A.'s arrest, a farewell party was organised for Pascal D., then commander of the 2nd KSK company at the barracks in Calw. At the event, which was supposed to resemble a Roman Emperor's theme party, a lot of alcohol was consumed and there was archery and a competition involving the throwing of a severed pig's head. A prostitute who had been flown in was presented as a prize to the winner. The woman later described the party in detail to journalists and Bundeswehr investigators, and said she had seen soldiers listening to neo-Nazi rock music and giving the Hitler salute. Flade (2021): 4.

⁸⁸ *Zweiter Bericht...*, 31.

⁸⁹ Knight, Ben, "Should Germany bring back compulsory military service?", *Deutsche Welle*, 7-7-2020.

demokratischen Verbassung und ihrer Institutionen” (The Reichswehr of the Weimar Republic was, as is well known, no guarantor of democratic legitimacy and its institutions)⁹⁰.

The investigation remains open as demonstrated by the arrests of 7 December 2022 because the aim is to determine, as AKK acknowledged, whether there is indeed “a shadow army”⁹¹ ready to seize power through the use of violence.

⁹⁰ Knorr (1998): 57.

⁹¹ *Mad-Report...*, 15.

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