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German court to give verdict in Yom Kippur synagogue attack

AP (21.12.20) - <https://cutt.ly/ahMUeCC> - A German court is expected to deliver its verdict Monday in the trial of a right-wing extremist who attacked a synagogue on Yom Kippur, Judaism's holiest day, killing two people after he failed to gain entry to the building.

The Oct. 9, 2019, attack is considered one of the worst anti-Semitic assaults in Germany's post-war history. The 28-year-old defendant, Stephan Balliet, has is alleged to have posted a screed against Jews before trying to shoot his way into the synagogue in the eastern city of Halle while broadcasting the attack live on a popular gaming site.

Federal prosecutors have asked the Naumburg state court, meeting in nearby Magdeburg, to convict Balliet of murder, attempted murder, incitement to hatred and attempted violent extortion. They urged judges to find him "seriously culpable," meaning that he would be barred from early release after 15 years.

During his trial, which began in July, Balliet admitted he wanted to enter the synagogue and kill all the 51 people inside. When he was unable to open the building's heavy doors, the German shot and killed a 40-year-old woman in the street outside and a 20-year-old man at a nearby kebab shop, and wounded several others.

He apologized to the court for killing the woman, saying that "I didn't want to kill whites."

German authorities have vowed to step up measures against far-right extremism following the Halle attack, the killing of a regional politician by a suspected neo-Nazi and the fatal shooting of nine people of immigrant background in Hanau — all of which happened within a year.

German pastor's sentence for hate speech against homosexuals prompts different reactions

Olaf Latzel used insulting language to speak about LGBT activists in a small group seminar that was later posted on Youtube.



Pastor Olaf Latzel speaking at the St. Martini Church in Bremen. / Photo: Facebook St. Martini Church

Evangelical Focus (03.12.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2VIiaJN> - A court in Bremen (Germany) has condemned a well-known and controversial Protestant pastor for hate speech against homosexuals.

Olaf Latzel, pastor of the mainline Evangelical Church Germany (EKD) church St. Martini in Bremen, has been sentenced to **3 months of prison and 8,100 euros**. Latzel will appeal the sentence.

The court said the pastor promoted hate against homosexuals and violated their dignity in a **marriage seminar in November 2019** in which he addressed the activities of what he called the "homolobby".

Speaking to around 30 couples he said at one point: **"All around walk the criminals of the Christopher Street Day [the Berlin Pride March]**. All this gender shit is an attack against God's order of creation, it is demonic and satanic". The video was posted months later on his Youtube channel, and later deleted.

In the process, the defence of Latzel said these views were based on the Bible and **referred to homosexuality and violent LGBT activists and not to homosexual people**.

The **judge dismissed** it considering that "the homosexual orientation of a person is a part of its personality".

Latzel's lawyer, said the sentence is a "catastrophe". He described it as **"the opening of a door to restrict freedom of speech"**, and added that "while today this is about a view found in the Bible, tomorrow it will be about any other opinion".

Groups of **people protesting** both for and against Latzel gathered outside the building during the session in which the sentence was announced.

Reactions

The **leadership of Protestant Church in Bremen**, which previously had “condemned in the strongest terms” the conduct of Latzel, reacted to the ruling by saying they were “deeply concerned that a pastor of our church is condemned for promotion of hate against a group of people”. They also added expressed concern about how Latzel’s behaviour damaged the image of the Church, and added that they would open an internal reflection.

In the **context of evangelicalism**, a jurist and columnist of German evangelical news agency *Idea* spoke of “clearly wrong judgement”. In contrast, a columnist of evangelical magazine *Pro Medien Magazin* concluded that “noisy verbal violence against homosexuals may rally your own followers, but will **put off outsiders for ever**”.

Some Christian users of **social media** were “relieved” that the “hate preacher” had been finally sentenced, while others warned that Christians were starting to be persecuted “only for preaching the gospel”.

A controversial and popular figure

For many years, Latzel has been a controversial conservative evangelical figure in the midst of the largely theologically liberal German Protestant church.

His **position on the role of women spiritual leadership, ecumenism and Islam** have often clashed with that of other Protestant pastors.

His theological positions and his use of language have been largely criticised, prompting **two online petitions** asking the Bremen Protestant Church to remove him from his post.

Nevertheless, the attendance to St. Martini’s church has grown to over 400 people in the last years, and the **subscribers of his Youtube channel** have grown to **over 26,000 subscribers**.

In the past, Latzel’s St. Martini Church has denounced **paint attacks** against his buildings and LGBT actions interrupting worship services.

Scientology v. Germany: 50 years of legal battles

HRWF (05.10.2020) - As Scientologists celebrate the 50th anniversary of the settlement of their Church in Germany, Ivan Arjona, their European representative, requested a UN investigation into discrimination against Scientologists in Germany during a statement at the 45th session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Arjona reminded Germany’s representative to the UN that “over the past three decades, dozens of German courts have condemned the actions of the government against Scientologists at different levels and recognized their rights as per Article 4 of [the

German] Constitution." Article 4 decrees that: "Freedom of faith and conscience, and freedom to profess a religious or philosophical creed shall be inviolable."

He also stressed that the German executive powers have ignored the decisions of the German courts for almost 50 years now.

"Sect filters" and discrimination

Last year, at the OSCE/ODIHR Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) in Warsaw, some NGOs criticised Germany for stigmatising and discriminating against people who believe in the teachings of Scientology.

In Bavaria and a few other German Länder, the authorities use what they call "sect filters" when someone applies for a public job, a public service contract or a government bid. These "sect filters" contain questions exclusively targeting the possible affiliation or relationship of the candidate with Scientology. If so, the candidate is disqualified. If the applicant refuses to fill in the questionnaire, they are also disqualified.

"This is not only intrusive and discriminatory, but this gravely violates the international human rights standards and stigmatises the followers of Ron Hubbard's teachings as sub-citizens," one of the NGOs said. The teachings of Scientology are not banned in Germany and spreading them is not a criminal activity. Therefore, their followers should not be treated differently from the followers of the Bible, the Coran, the Bhagavad Gita, the Buddhist or any other teachings.

The German delegation to the OSCE replied to these challenges by stating that in their country Scientology is not recognized as a religious community.

However, this answer was irrelevant for two main reasons. Firstly, according to the OSCE/ODIHR standards, a non-recognition of a religious or belief system by the state does not justify discrimination against its followers. Secondly, German courts have already ruled that Scientology was entitled to the protection of Article 4 of the Basic Law on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

German court decisions finding Scientologists and their Church to be protected under Article 4 of the German Constitution

1. *Church of Scientology of Berlin v. City of Berlin*, 27 February 2009, Berlin Administrative Court.
2. *B. v. City of Hamburg*, 27 June 2008, Hamburg Administrative Court.
3. *Church of Scientology of Germany, Church of Scientology of Hamburg v. City of Hamburg*, 7 March 2008, Hamburg Civil Court of Appeal.
4. *B. v. City of Hamburg*, 19 December 2007, Hamburg State Administrative Court of Appeal (referred to in #2 above at page 5).
5. *Church of Scientology of Berlin v. City of Berlin*, 29 June 2006, Administrative Court Berlin.
6. *B. v. City of Hamburg*, 15 June 2006, Administrative Court Hamburg.
7. *K. v. City of Hamburg*, 15 December 2005, Federal Administrative Supreme Court.
8. *Winkler v. State of Bavaria*, Federal Supreme Administrative Court, March 2005.
9. *Celebrity Centre Church of Scientology Munich v. County of Upper Bavaria*, 2 November 2005, Bavarian State Administrative Court of Appeal.
10. *K. v. City of Hamburg*, 17 June 2004, Hamburg State Administrative Court of Appeal.
11. *Church of Scientology of Dusseldorf v. City of Dusseldorf*, District Court Dusseldorf, March 2004.

12. *Church of Scientology Stuttgart v. State of Baden-Württemberg*, 12 December 2003, State Administrative Court of Appeal Baden-Württemberg.
13. *Church of Scientology International v. City of Hamburg*, 22 April 2003, State Administrative Court of Appeal Hamburg.
14. *Church of Scientology International v. City of Munich*, 26 March 2003, Munich Administrative Court.
15. *Z. v. Church of Scientology Berlin*, 26 September 2002, Federal Supreme Labor Court.
16. *Church of Scientology International v. City of Hamburg*, July 2002, State Administrative Court of Appeal Hamburg.
17. *Scientology Mission Ulm v. City of Kempten/Allgäu*, 25 November 1996, Administrative Court Augsburg.
18. *Church of Scientology Bavaria v. Federal Labor Office*, 19 January 2000, Social Court Nuremberg.
19. *Church of Scientology Stuttgart v. City of Stuttgart*, 17 November 1999, Administrative Court Stuttgart.
20. *H. v. Church of Scientology Hamburg*, 5 January 1998, District Civil Court of Hamburg.
21. *Scientology Mission Neue Brücke v. State of Baden-Württemberg*, 6 November 1997, Federal Supreme Administrative Court.
22. *City of Freiburg v. E.*, 6 February 1996, District Court Freiburg.
23. *Scientology Mission Neue Brücke v. State of Baden-Württemberg*, 2 August 1995, State Administrative Court of Appeal Baden-Württemberg.
24. *Church of Scientology Hamburg v. City of Hamburg*, 16 February 1995, Federal Supreme Administrative Court.
25. *Church of Scientology Hamburg v. City of Hamburg*, 24 August 1994, State Administrative Court of Appeal Hamburg.
26. *S. v. Scientology Mission Nymphenburg*, 30 March 1993, Superior Civil Court Munich.
27. *Church of Scientology Germany v. State Baden-Württemberg/ABI*, 26 August 1992, Administrative Court Stuttgart.
28. *G. v. Church of Scientology Frankfurt*, 27 May 1992, Superior Civil Court of Frankfurt.
29. *Scientologist v. Newspaper Publishing House*, June 1992, Civil Court of Appeal Stuttgart.
30. *State Attorney with Superior Court Berlin v. Church of Scientology of Berlin*, 22 January 1991.
31. *City of Hannover v. H.*, 19 September 1990, District Court Hannover.
32. *Church of Scientology Frankfurt v. City of Frankfurt*, 4 September 1990, Administrative Court Frankfurt.
33. *P. v. Church of Scientology Frankfurt*, 7 June 1989, Superior Civil Court Frankfurt.
34. *Church of Scientology Berlin v. State of Berlin*, 12 October 1988, Administrative Court Berlin.
35. *Church of Scientology Celebrity Centre Hamburg v. City of Hamburg*, 17 February 1988, Superior Civil Court Hamburg.
36. *Church of Scientology of Frankfurt v. City of Frankfurt*, 7 October 1987, State Attorney with the Superior Court of Frankfurt.
37. *Scientology Mission Ulm v. State of Baden-Württemberg*, 3 September 1986, Administrative Court Sigmaringen.
38. *Church of Scientology Germany v. City of Munich*, 10 December 1985, Bavarian State Administrative Court of Appeal.
39. *Church of Scientology Hamburg v. City of Hamburg*, 14 October 1985, Administrative Court Hamburg.
40. *Church of Scientology Germany v. City of Munich*, 25 June 1985, Bavarian State Administrative Court of Appeal.
41. *In re City of Stuttgart v. K.*, 20 May 1985, District Court Stuttgart.

42. *In re City of Stuttgart v. M.*, 30 January 1985, District Court Stuttgart.
 43. *Church of Scientology Germany v. City of Munich*, 25 July 1984, Administrative Court Munich.
 44. *X. v. City of Berlin*, 11 February 1981, Administrative Court Berlin.
 45. *Church of Scientology Germany v. Federal Republic of Germany*, 25 September 1980, Federal Supreme Court.
 46. *S. v. Federal Republic of Germany*, 27 August 1980, Administrative Court Frankfurt.
 47. *X. v. Federal Republic of Germany*, 14 December 1978, Administrative Court Darmstadt (and appeal of 14 November 1980).
 48. *F. v. Church of Scientology Stuttgart*, 8 December 1976, District Court Stuttgart.
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Germany: Anti-Semitic attack at Hamburg synagogue

A German man dressed in military fatigues attacked another man outside a synagogue in the German city of Hamburg, according to police. Germany's foreign minister said anti-Semitic attacks are not isolated incidents.

DW News (04.10.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3iASrvU> - A man attacked a Jewish citizen outside the Hohe Weide synagogue in Hamburg on Sunday, according to police.

The man swung a foldable shovel, injuring a 26-year-old before the synagogue's security personnel were able to restrain him. He was later taken into custody by Hamburg police. Germany's DPA news agency reported the 29-year-old suspect was carrying a piece of paper with a swastika in his pocket.

The victim, reported to be a Jewish student, suffered serious injuries to the head and was admitted to a local hospital for treatment, according to the daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. His injuries are serious though not life-threatening.

Police said the attacker, a German with Kazakh roots, was accused of causing grievous bodily harm and appeared to be acting alone. A police spokesperson said the motive for the attack was still under investigation and that the suspect was "extremely confused" leaving investigators unable immediately to question him.

Members of the city's Jewish community were at the synagogue celebrating Sukkoth.

'Why does this keep happening?'

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas denounced the attack as anti-Semitic and called on people to show more civil courage.

"This is not an isolated incident, this is disgusting anti-Semitism and we must all oppose it!" Maas wrote in a tweet.

"As we mark the one-year anniversary of the Yom Kippur attack in Halle, Germany, which left two dead, I am saddened to learn that once again, this time on the Jewish holiday of Sukkot, a German Jewish community is confronting a violent, antisemitic act of terror," World Jewish Congress President Ronald S. Lauder said in a statement.

"We must ask ourselves, and German local and national authorities must address the question – why does this keep happening? Why is anti-Semitism thriving, and why does anyone believe there is room for such hate?" Lauder added. "Our young people must not learn from those who hate. The German government must take responsibility in

strengthening education so that the next generation understands that hatred of any kind is never permissible. The long-term viability of Jewish life in Germany depends on it."

Jewish community shaken

The German Orthodox Rabbinical Conference (ORD) has described the attack as "another shock to the Jewish community in Germany."

"It is unbearable to see hatred and violence against Jews erupt again and again on German streets, and this comes during the holiest Jewish holidays and one year after the terrible attack in Halle," said ORD chairman Avichai Apel on Sunday.

Apel added "Jewish life as a whole must be better protected in this country," and demanded that German society "take even more decisive action against hate and incitement on the internet, against right-wing extremist agitators, against the Neo Nazi scene and crude conspiracy theorists, and do more for prevention, education and the promotion of civic courage."

Nearly one year since Halle attack

The attack in Hamburg came ahead of the one-year anniversary of a deadly Yom Kippur synagogue attack in the eastern German city of Halle. In that attack, a man armed with a gun attempted to break down a door to a synagogue as worshipers gathered for the holiest day in the Jewish calendar. Though he was not able to enter the synagogue, two people were shot dead and others were injured.

Germany has recently seen an increase in anti-Semitic crimes, leading Chancellor Angela Merkel to declare some Jews do not feel safe in Germany.

German far-right crimes rise

Germany recorded over 22,000 right-wing extremist crimes last year, according to preliminary interior ministry statistics. And twice as many weapons permits were issued than the previous year.

DW (07.04.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2URdRwc> - Germany last year recorded 41,175 politically-motivated crimes, with more than half of them (22,337) attributed to right-wing extremists. This is according to the federal interior ministry in preliminary data requested by Irene Mihalic, a police officer and criminologist who is now the Green party's interior affairs expert.

Mihalic found that the figures also show that the count of officially notified weapons permits held by far-right extremists had doubled since 2018, reaching 892.

"This development marks a dangerous weapons buildup within the [far-right] scene," said Mihalic, while calling for a "resolute disarming" of such individuals.

Crimes committed by neo-Nazis amounted to an "enormous threat," she told the Funke Media Group, a newspaper and online chain based in Essen incorporating several local publications.

Mihalic's remarks follow the [murder last June of regional politician Walter Lübcke](#) in Kassel, a gunman's [attack on the synagogue in Halle](#) last September and February's [far-right shootings at hookah cafes in Hanau](#).

A documentary broadcast on Monday by German public broadcaster ZDF estimated that only 8% of 2,558 attacks on asylum-seekers' hostels between 2015 and 2018 resulted in perpetrators actually being convicted, fined or jailed.

The 22,337 extreme right-wing cases from 2019 made public Tuesday — pending final figures due in May — represented almost a 10% rise on 2018, when 20,431 crimes were recorded.

Police specialists who document politically-motivated crimes, classed the bulk of the 2019 extreme-right cases as "propaganda" and "hate-speech" incitement crimes.

More seriously, 986 involved attempted or perpetrated violence, including bodily injury and widely reported fatal incidents.

In all, 609 of the crimes were directed at political office-holders, 95 against media representatives, and 92 against minors (children and teenagers), said the ministry

"These are shocking numbers," said Mihalic, "which, in comparison with other areas of crime, underscore once more the extent of the extreme right danger."

Stephan Thomae, deputy chairman of the opposition pro-business liberal Free Democrat (FDP) parliamentary group, described the trend as a "big danger for our democracy."

In recent months, Chancellor Angela Merkel's government had focused on the problem, but "measures decided so far are simply inadequate," Thomae said.

"The increased number of propaganda offences, cases of civil incitement and anti-Semitic crimes is alarming," Thomae added, calling for a reorganization of policing structures in Germany and more resources for courts.

The ministry statistics delivered to Mihalic also listed 9,849 crimes as leftist extremist and 427 crimes as religiously-motivated, mainly by extremist Islamists.

The federal government also highlighted a rise in anti-Semitic crimes directed at persons of Jewish belief or their facilities. In 2018, 1,799 such cases were counted, there were 2,032 in 2019's provisional tally.

871 attacks reported against Muslims in Germany in 2019

Daily Sabah (29.03.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3atZqUo> - Some 871 attacks targeted the Muslim community in Germany last year, according to a report by a German daily Sunday. Two Muslims were killed, while 33 others were injured in these attacks, Neue Osnabrücker Zeitung daily reported, citing the government's response to a question submitted by the Left Party (Die Linke).

According to Left Party's spokesperson Ulla Jelpke, the number may be higher by up to 90 more cases when the final number has been released, based on her "experience."

"The hatred of Muslims continues to be displayed in violent attacks, threats and insults," Jelpke told the daily, adding that it is still too early to have a clear picture on the total number of cases.

"Unfortunately, we have to expect that there are more similar ticking time bombs," she underlined.

Germany has been recording Islamophobic crimes separately since 2017. The total number of cases in 2019 has not been officially announced. In 2018 there were 910, including 48 attacks on mosques alone, a little lower than 2017 with 1,095 crimes. More than 90% of these were attributed to politically motivated crimes by the far-right. Considering that the overall number of crimes has decreased, the assaults have increased, Die Tageszeitung stressed. In 2017 authorities reported 56 Islamophobic assaults with a total of 38 injuries. In 2018, there were 74 offenses with a total of 52 injuries – including two attempted murders.

Every other day throughout the course of 2019, a mosque, a Muslim institution or a religious representative in Germany was targeted in anti-Muslim attacks, another inquiry by the Left Party showed recently.

The figure was collated by the German Interior Ministry under the scope of the new "Attack Catalogue," listing anti-Muslim attacks on cultural associations, cemeteries, mosques, religious institutions, representatives, symbols and other places of worship since January 2019. The catalog only contains a portion of all the crimes against Islam but has a broader scope than only listing the attacks on mosques.

The latest violent anti-Muslim attacks took place in the town Hanau on Feb. 19. Tobias Rathjen, a terrorist harboring racist views, gunned down nine people of immigrant backgrounds, including five Turkish nationals, before killing himself. The Hanau attack ignited the debate over the seriousness of far-right terror threats often ignored by authorities. It was one of the worst acts of terrorism with racist motives in recent memory.

In a speech following the attack, German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer acknowledged the act as a "terrorist attack." He noted that it was the "third right-wing terrorist attack in just a few months." "Danger from right-wing extremism, anti-Semitism, and racism is very high in Germany," Seehofer said. He also dismissed references to the assailant's psychological state as being responsible for the killings. "The racist motivation for this crime is in my view incontestable and cannot be relativized by anything."

Germany is home to 81 million people and is home to the second-largest Muslim population in Western Europe after France. Of the country's nearly 4.7 million Muslims, at least 3 million are of Turkish origin.

Racist attacks targeting Muslims or immigrants increasingly make the headlines as white supremacists become more efficient in an age where their ideals, or at least parts of them, are going mainstream. Not a single, large terrorist group harboring a racist agenda against Muslims and immigrants exist, but copycat attacks apparently inspire more to take up arms.

The tolerant political climate under the pretext of freedom of speech helped far-right sympathizers with violent tendencies expand their support.

Facing growing far-right extremism, Germany has been shaken by more than 100 bomb and death threats sent to lawyers, politicians and institutions last year, apparently, by German neo-Nazi groups, local media reported, revealing the threat of a growing neo-Nazi presence in the country.

The extremist group is known as "Reichsbürger" is considered a terrorist organization in Germany where its members procure arms and ammunition. Reichsbürger members do not recognize the modern German state as legitimate, citing technicalities about the fall of the Nazi Third Reich in May 1945. The Reichsbürgers have no leadership or "cells," but are loosely associated with each other only by their common ideas that aren't even concrete.

In October, Chancellor Angela Merkel's government outlawed the sale of guns to members of extremist groups monitored by security agencies and obliged online platforms to inform police about hate content. Those measures followed the killing of a pro-immigration German politician in June and an attack four months later on a synagogue and a kebab shop in Halle by an anti-Semitic gunman, who livestreamed his actions.

Figures show a 320% rise in racist terrorism in the West in the past five years. Under the pretext of "Islamization" of the countries they live in, racist terrorists went from attacks on mosques to mass killings. Anders Behring Breivik of Norway who slaughtered 77 people in July 2011 is viewed as an inspiration for more attacks to follow. Four years later, Anton Lundin Pettersson, harboring similar views with Breivik, killed four students with immigrant backgrounds in Sweden. In 2016, 10 people were killed in Germany's Munich in another racist act of terrorism.