

Germany Cracks Down on Another Far-Right Group

The raids were the second such action in about a week and came about 10 months after the authorities foiled what they described as a far-right plot to topple the government.



By Aishvarya Kavi and Christopher F. Schuetze

Aishvarya Kavi reported from Berlin, and Christopher Schuetze from Munich.

The authorities in Germany on Wednesday banned a relatively small far-right group and raided the homes of its members in a coordinated sweep, the latest in a series of moves against extremist organizations in the country.

The crackdown is the second such action taken in the past several days. The latest group targeted, called Artgemeinschaft, was described by the authorities as racist and antisemitic, and promoted a white supremacist ideology, including advocating white-only families.

In Germany, it is illegal to display or promote Nazi ideology or other antisemitic views.

About a week ago, the authorities carried out similar raids against another racist far-right group, called the Hammerskins, a violent neo-Nazi organization that originated in the United States in the 1980s.

The latest crackdowns come nearly 10 months after the authorities foiled what they described as a far-right plot to topple the democratically elected government in Germany and replace it with a group led by an obscure prince.

Here is a breakdown of why such raids happen with relative frequency in Germany.

What happened in the latest crackdown?

About 700 police officers raided 26 houses across Germany in dismantling the Artgemeinschaft network. The raids were coordinated to start simultaneously in the early morning so that the group's members could not warn one another.

Officers were said to have confiscated evidence of members' activities along with funds — including gold — and propaganda material. The authorities also blocked the group's website and social media accounts at the same time.

What is known about the banned group?

Artgemeinschaft means “group of one kind” or “racial community.” The organization calls itself a “Germanic faith community” that promotes what it calls “Nordic,” or white, superiority.

Artgemeinschaft was slightly unusual because it had an esoteric focus on nature rituals such as summer solstice celebrations. But experts have said that the group had an outsize importance to the far right, acting as a nexus between disparate groups, and was involved in pushing its ideology to younger generations.

The “völkisch” beliefs espoused by the group, centered on German ethnonationalism, were a founding principle of the Nazis, according to Felix Wiedemann, an academic at Freie Universität Berlin who researches the far right.

Völkisch organizations, Mr. Wiedemann added, “connected race and religion” and therefore tended to act as “a political and religious group at the same time.”

The authorities said that Artgemeinschaft, believed to have about 150 members, was “neo-Nazi, racist, xenophobic and anti-democratic.”

Nancy Faeser, the German interior minister, said that it posed a significant threat.

“This right-wing extremist group has tried to raise new enemies of the Constitution by disgusting indoctrination of children and young people,” she said.

How common are such raids and bans?

The authorities in Germany regularly crack down on far-right groups, especially those that they say are a direct threat to the public peace and have infiltrated the military, the police and other security services.

“Right-wing extremism is the greatest danger for people in the country,” Ms. Faeser said last year.

Even before she took office in 2021, the Interior Ministry, which oversees the police and domestic security, often carried out busts against neo-Nazi groups. In 2020 alone, four neo-Nazi groups, including Combat 18, were banned and raided.

The authorities carry out the crackdowns after extensive work to build legal cases. The sweep on Artgemeinschaft on Wednesday, for example, took a full year to prepare, according to the Interior Ministry.

What is the political background to the raids?

Groups monitoring neo-Nazi and antisemitic activities have long warned about ethnonationalist organizations, said Lorenz Blumenthaler, who works for one such

watchdog, the Amadeu Antonio Foundation.

Under Ms. Faeser, the Interior Ministry has stepped up pressure on far-right organizations, Mr. Blumenthaler said.

Ms. Faeser is known for her work against such groups. Before she became a federal minister, she helped investigate a killing spree by a far-right terrorist group during her time as a lawmaker in the central state of Hesse.

However, she has attracted criticism recently for staying in her job at the Interior Ministry while she also runs a long-shot campaign to become governor of Hesse in an election on Oct. 8. If she wins, she will have to step down from the national role, and critics have argued that she should not be dividing her attention while holding such an important job.

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