



Bundeskriminalamt



**60 years of the BKA:
In the field of conflict between freedom and security**

BKA Autumn Conference, 6 - 7 December 2011

**Address on the occasion of the presentation
of the book entitled “Historienprojekt BKA”**

Full version

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President Ziercke, members of the BKA staff, ladies and gentlemen:

I appear before you today with a sprained left shoulder. The injury occurred during a dream: I lay immobilized on railroad tracks. A train was approaching – ever closer, ever larger, ever louder ... Just ahead of the oncoming wheels, I threw myself onto the floor – and you see the result today.

That introduction is not meant to awaken your sympathy, nor to distract from the subject at hand. The dream and the conference share the same *origin: the Nazi era and its legacy*. In my case, there is no need to probe the depths of my psyche. The dream is an expression of the constant fear of violent death that dominated my life in those years. Not because we took to the streets and hollered “Down with Hitler!” but simply because we were there at all in this world. Our crime was our existence as Jews. The memories of my fear for my mother, my father, my brothers and sisters and for myself as well, that inner hell, have accompanied me ever since, even long after the ruling devils of that hell were deposed by the tide of history.

The genesis of the “*Historienprojekt BKA*” (BKA History Project) lies in its murderous pre-history and in the deficits that plagued all efforts to come to grips with it following the establishment of the BKA in 1951. Both phenomena, the epochal “project” and the recollection of the fear of death that refuses to die, have spun long threads extending over more than half a century – continuities that now converge at this conference. And if you recognize in the course of my presentation today the inner obstacles I was compelled to overcome in order to speak to you here today, then you may also understand how much this opportunity means to me ...

While one might naturally expect that I would come to this book presentation and accept the invitation extended by its mentor and his colleagues, that would not have been the case during much of my lifetime. Yet there is fundamental reason for my presence here today: my sense of *belonging* to the country in which I was born. For the first ten years of my life, which began in 1923, I did indeed take that for granted. Up in the north of Hamburg, wrapped in the cocoon of my family, a familiar neighbourhood and my beloved playmates. But that did not last. What follows in appropriate brevity, but from the essence of my biography, is the chronicle of a shattered Elysium – blow by blow:

1933, April, three months after Hitler’s “seizure of power” on 30 January: “Aryans here, non-Aryans there!” Thus it was on the first day of school at the Johanneum, a humanist secondary school; a dividing line that hadn’t been there the day before. I had just turned ten. 1934, summer: “Ralle, we can’t play with you anymore. You’re a Jew.” That was Heinemann, my best friend – until then. A blow to the heart I can still feel today. 1935, September: The blunt lessons of the so-called “*Laws for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour*”, the code of law for new era for the Jews of

Germany. Some of it was still incomprehensible to a twelve-year-old, but he got the calamitous message nonetheless. 1938, 10 November, the day *after Reichspogromnacht* – the Night of Broken Glass: shards of glass from the shop windows of Jewish merchants smashed during the night crunching beneath the soles of my feet. 1939, September, shortly after the outbreak of war (I was sixteen at the time): my first “interrogation” by the Gestapo at the Hamburg command centre on charges of “anti-government statements” which “your bitch of a Yiddish mother taught you”, as my interrogator put it. 1941, October: first revelations of mass murders of Jews in the occupied regions of Eastern Europe. 1944, August: I was twenty-one; my second “interrogation”, orgies of beatings, unreal ordeals that culminated in the overwhelming wish that I had never been born. After twelve years under the unbearable yoke of the Race Laws the deportation order came, followed by my flight to a rat-infested hideout. There, nearly starved to death, I was liberated by the British Army under Field Marshal Montgomery on 4 May 1945.

An incomplete chronicle of those twelve years, yet presumably explanation enough to show that *belonging* had long since become a foreign word. And how could it regain its meaning in the thoroughly dishonest federal German society of denial of those first legislative sessions.

I repeat what I said at the opening colloquium - “*Aufbau des BKA — Kalte Amnestie auf demokratischer Grundlage*” in 2007, an undeniable truth: “We live in a land in which the greatest crime in history, which took millions and millions of victims - killed, it must be said, behind the fronts like insects – was followed by the greatest rehabilitation project for perpetrators the world has ever known. With very few exceptions, they not only evaded punishment but were also permitted to pursue their careers unhindered.

Not that there were no trials in German courts, because there were. Yet the majority of defendants were the lowest links in the chain of industrial serial killing, mass murder and genocide, the minor clerks of administrative massacre, the killer workers of the Holocaust itself. Not their superiors, not the wartime industrial managers and golden pheasants of the NSDAP, not the desk-bound murderers of millions beneath the roof of the annihilation centre, the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, and certainly not the generals gathered beneath the swastika, without whom none of that, absolute none of it, could have happened.

I have referred to that as “the second guilt”, the denial of the first guilt under Hitler, and not merely as a rhetorical or moral category, but firmly institutionalized by the “Great Peace with the Perpetrators” – the birth defect of the Federal Republic of Germany. And still a blank spot in history for broad segments of the population. I had a revealing experience in that context during the Berlin symposium entitled “*Das Bundeskriminalamt stellt sich seiner Geschichte*” at the *Hertie School of Governance* in June 2009. At the end of the symposium, two police students – a man and a woman – came to me hoping to learn more about the memorable code phrase “second guilt”. In the course of

our conversation I was compelled to realize that the nearly collective decriminalization of Nazi perpetrators, which was supported by a national consensus, that crucial segment of German post-war history, had never entered the minds of these two highly intelligent young people. In the face of that deficit, they concluded with dismay that “the subject of the second guilt should be taught in school”.

Even now, more than 60 years after the demise of the “Third Reich” it is evident that although Hitler and everything that name symbolizes were defeated in a *military* sense, the legacy lives on in spirit, or rather in its mindless absence. What Hitler and the national collective of his followers implanted in the hearts and minds of the nation has billowed over the decades in the those of all too many people– only to implode in our day.

You know what I am talking about. It is enough, more than enough, and I cannot leave this place without having gotten it off my chest.

As if on a casual stroll through the park, a Nazi gang and its supporters murders its way across Germany for thirteen years, and no one picks up their track. When the bloody trail – and its branching paths – are finally discovered, the Federal Republic is suddenly awakened from its dreamy ignorance ... I have two questions. First, where were the confidential informants all those many years? Again: Where were the allegedly indispensable informants? Second: What would have happened if the murdered victims hadn’t been so-called “little people” and in fact – as we are so fond of saying today – people with a “migration background”? What if the victims of these politically motivated assassins had been high-ranking representatives of the political, business, church or scientific communities, as back then, during the reign of terror of the RAF years, when security measures turned the Republic upside down? The question practically answers itself.

Nothing has ever appealed as strongly to the instinct to flee injected in me by the Nazis as the defensive stance of police and security agencies in the face of the brown threat from the radical right. More alarming, almost, than the renaissance of German right-wing extremism is what has made it possible: the often very different visual acuity of the right and left eyes of the Republic.

At no time in its history has the anti-democratic right been exposed to the militant resistance our historical experience clearly shows that it deserves. If it had, then the question of whether the NPD should be banned or not would never have been posed, because the prevailing atmosphere of German society would not have permitted such a party to exist.

Having been treated so shamefully, the families of the victims deserve all of the care and attention they can be given. There is so much to make up for.

Yet the political impact goes far beyond that group of people.

I am talking about seismographers of society, about people who are horrified at what has suddenly emerged 65 years after the collapse of Hitler’s Germany: the old mortal enemy of yesteryear in the form of a new generation of people who were not born as xenophobes and anti-Semites but have become just that in the course of their lives.

That brings old fears to the surface, and I speak in the name of those fears when I say this:

The Germany of today should, indeed must know that there are still people living within its borders who cannot – and will not – forget. It should and must know that there are still witnesses to the Holocaust who are reminded of the gas chambers of Auschwitz and the gas wagons of Chelmo when they happen to breathe in the exhaust fumes of motorized metal symbols of prosperity during rush hour. Reunited Germany should, indeed must know that there are still people here who are reminded by the sight of any wound or drop of blood of the mass graves of murder victims at Babi Yar on the outskirts of Kiev or of the destroyed city of Lidice in the Czech Republic or of the eradicated town of Oradour-sur-Glane in France; that there are people who cringe in fright when they hear the equally meaningless and overused word “*Einsatz*” (operation) – having experience the mobile death squads of the “*Einsatzgruppen*” (commando groups) who killed thousands of Jews behind the lines of the German eastern front. I refuse to use these terms from the *Lingua tertii imperii*, the “language of the Third Reich” ever again – except for the purposes of a necessary demonstration such as this one.

I speak of such people because I am one of them. And because I am deeply alarmed, as they are.

A bulwark behind which I have been living all these years, here in Germany, first in the divided land, then in the reunited nation – *the democratic republic, the constitutional democracy* – now appears to be under attack. It is my elixir, the air that I breathe. In view of the options for comparison my biography offers me it is the only form of society in which I feel safe. It is something precious, which I will defend tooth and nail. It is the foundation on which my whole being rests.

Therefore, Christian or Muslim, Jew or atheist, leftist or rightist, large or small - whoever attacks democracy, threatens it, damages it or seeks to abolish it will have me to deal. I’ll go for his throat. He’ll not shake me off.

But I should also say this, even if my fears turn out to be unfounded: It is bad enough that our times force such thought and doubts upon me.

And so it helps, after all those gruelling experiences of professional denial, to happen upon a treatise based on honesty and integrity, and to be involved in it as well: the “*Historienprojekt BKA*”.

Yet the compulsion to seek the truth, especially where it hurts, must also remain *the* criterion when it comes to examining the reasons for the failure of the security agen-

cies. There must be no attempt to gloss over the facts, no beating around the bush; simply honesty and integrity in the analysis of errors.

For it is precisely that which impressed me so much about the “*Historienprojekt BKA*”. And when I cite the name Jörg Ziercke as its personification, I mean it to stand for all those who have been involved in this “*Opus magnum*”.

Allow me to flatter myself and mention that the initial contact came from the BKA itself as an expression of its willingness to examine these matters. I quote:

“To what extent does the concept of the ‘second guilt’ cited by the publicist Ralph Giordano, according to which the German people denied their ‘first guilt’, the crimes committed under Hitler, and integrated numerous Nazi criminals seamlessly into post-war society, apply to the Bundeskriminalamt?”

That was the spark that ignited my involvement in this project.

And indeed, what has since come to light from the horror cabinet of Nazi police history strains even the imagination of those who have concerned themselves for a lifetime in horrible familiarity with the murderous Nazi universe.

Against this background, one is horrified to learn of the many who rose to fame and renown at the BKA. Members of the “*Einsatzgruppen*”, whose mobile death squads murdered hundreds of thousands of Jews in the Baltic region, among them the head of the Gestapo in Vilnius. He and others like him became section chiefs and department heads; the Chief of Search Operations of the *Reichskriminalamt*, believe it or not, became the Chief of Search Operations at the BKA. Formerly responsible for all search operations in the Great German Empire and the occupied territories, and accountable in that capacity for thousands and thousands of victims, the SS *Sturmabahnführer* and mass murderer glided untouched into retirement in 1964. That is only *one* example out of many – and a persuasive affirmation of the “second guilt”.

It took a new generation at the BKA to awaken public awareness of this personnel continuity that extended into the highest echelons of the BKA, and to expose anti-democratic attitudes, racist theories and autocratic management styles that persisted long after the BKA was founded.

Slowly, as slowly as one ice age replaces another, and associated with the name of President Horst Herold, the BKA has shaken off its past and left the personnel and organizational bonds with predecessor institutions behind. And I have registered a gratifyingly unpretentious sense of pride in the fact that the BKA has since evolved into an internationally respected police agency.

That did not happen without resistance from the *old school*, by the way, and I can say that I could not help but notice some of that during my five years of contact with the

BKA. Thus, for example, certain voices heard in the course of discussions during the Wiesbaden symposia expressed dissatisfaction with the new climate of openness. In fact, some even went so far as to declare that they would never set foot in the halls of the BKA again. Rearguard actions, certainly, but they serve to illustrate the tenacity with which pre-democratic patterns of thought and behaviour survived into the 21st century as a legacy of debt from misguided history.

In conclusion: Survivors of the Holocaust are often asked, “How could you remain in this country in spite of everything that happened? How do you manage that?” I’d like to give you an answer, *my* answer, here and now, from this rostrum: This country of Germany never asked me what I wanted or didn’t want. I am nailed fast to this country. It has made me inseparable from itself. No matter where I might have tried to flee from it, it would have caught up with me anywhere.

And so I have remained, not as a Jewish angel of vengeance or an extended arm of a punishing Jehovah, but rather as one who has spent his whole life struggling with the burden of being a German – a German Jew or a Jewish German – who cannot and will not cast off that burden. Prepared for reconciliation with anyone who makes an honest effort, and even with any former Nazi who does so. But absolutely unable to reconcile myself with unwillingness to see the truth.

And thus I welcome the presentation of the “*Historienprojekts BKA*” on this seventh day of December as an act of national solidarity, and am filled with feelings for which I have been waiting for many years. I thank you for that!

I express my thanks in the spirit of a motto that could only have been fought and suffered for. It is *my* guiding principle, *my* charter, *my* compass – and it reads as follows: “Praise life and never forget Auschwitz – Never forget Auschwitz and praise life!”