



# KOSOVO

## COMPROMISE 2007

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## German spy affair might have been revenge

Welt

<http://www.welt.de/english-news/article2806537/German-spy-affair-might-have-been-revenge.html>

Now that the three agents of the German Federal Intelligence Service (BND) have been released from prison in Kosovo, speculations are circling on how Germany will respond, as well as what caused the incident in the first place. One view holds that the agents were held as retribution for reports on key Kosovar officials by German intelligence services.

In the hours before the release of the three German spies from Kosovo on November 28, nerves in Berlin were taugth. That day, security circles hardly believed anymore that the BND agents would be released by evening. The Pristina district court was still in deliberations. An end did not seem to be in sight.

At the same time, all doubts concerning the culpability of the BND agents seemed to have already been cleared. The previously unheard of 'Army of the Republic of Kosovo' (ARK) had accepted responsibility for the bomb attack. Laboratory tests had shown no evidence of the BND agents' involvement. In addition, a television report had aired quoting a police report that allegedly said that the Germans had in no way been involved. All of this did not seem to move the judges in Kosovo. Though they had no evidence, they let the agents sit in prison.

Why did they act this way? Why was the issue not dealt with quietly and discreetly, behind the scenes, as is the norm between friendly nations? Searching for answers to these questions leads to a murky underworld of organized crime and secret service schemes. It illuminates the difficult German-Kosovar relations as well as the tense relationship between the BND and the German federal government.

When the German authorities in Berlin were made to believe that the BND agents would not be freed immediately, all the resentment that had been building for the past days welled to the surface. It was then directed at Pristina. There was talk of "massive pressure" being exerted by the German government. The German authorities threatened to cut aid to Kosovo. Only then were the three men let free on Friday evening. On Saturday morning they were flown out of the country by a special plane of the BND.

### An unnecessary drama

The entire drama could have ended a week earlier, quietly and discreetly, according to intelligence experts. "The German government should have put greater pressure on the Kosovar government," the conservative politician and secret service expert Bernd Schmidbauer now says. The former federal judge Wolfgang Neskovic of the Left

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Party is also mystified by the reaction of the German government. “Foreign Minister Steinmeier should have personally and publicly engaged himself in the freeing of the BND agents,” he said.

A high-ranking BND official spoke out with yet sharper words. “The German government had allowed itself to be dragged by the nose through global politics by a country in which organized crime is the form of government,” he told the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*. These harsh words will surely contribute to rekindling the flames of antagonism, temporarily cooled, between the BND and the Federal Chancellery, or rather between BND President Ernst Uhrlau and Head of the Chancellery Lothar de Maiziere.

BND chief Uhrlau has missed the backup from de Maiziere on more than one occasion, most recently concerning the purchase of DVDs with the information of tax evaders in Liechtenstein. The BND also felt itself left in the lurch in the case of the Guantanamo prisoner Murat Kurnaz.

This time the BND can hardly accuse the chancellery of inactivity, however. According to information obtained by the *Welt am Sonntag*, the German government only confronted the Kosovar leadership on Tuesday Nov. 25, when it became clear that all attempts to free the agents through diplomatic channels were not bearing fruit. De Maziere called up Kosovo Prime Minister Hashim Thaci and threatened consequences should the Germans remain behind bars. The threat was formalized on Friday.

According to information obtained by the *Welt am Sonntag*, the German government has since Friday been seriously considering freezing aid it has already promised to Kosovo. A final decision has not been made. Nonetheless, concrete speculations have been made about cutting aid in specific areas, according to the information. The main area under consideration is defense.

Such a step would certainly hurt Kosovo, given that Germany is the second largest bilateral donor country after the United States. Since 1999, Germany has given 280 million euros to the Kosovo authorities. Given his actions in the BND affair, Prime Minister Thaci will have to deal with such consequences. But why did he choose to pick this fight with Germany in the first place?

### **An act of revenge?**

In security circles one hears various answers to this question. The most common one is that the action was taken as revenge. The reason is a 67-page long, hard-hitting analysis by the BND about organized crime in Kosovo and a confidential report contracted by the German military, the Bundeswehr. In contrast to the CIA and MI6, both German intelligence reports accuse Thaci as well as former Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj and Xhavit Haliti of the parliamentary leadership of far-reaching involvement in organized crime.



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The BND writes: “The key players (including Haliti, Haradinaj, and Thaci) are intimately involved in inter-linkages between politics, business, and organized crime structures in Kosovo.” At the end of the 1990s, the report accuses Thaci of leading a “criminal network operating throughout Kosovo.” At that time he was a co-founder of the Kosovo Liberation Army, and led the Albanian delegation at the 1999 conference at Rambouillet that preceded the Kosovo war.

The BND report also accuses Thaci of contacts to the Czech and Albanian mafias. In addition, it accuses him, together with Haliti, of ordering killings through the professional hit man ‘Afrimi’, who is allegedly responsible for at least 11 contract murders.

Concerning Haradinaj, like Thaci seen as a protégé of the United States, the BND report says he was involved “in the full spectrum of criminal, political and military activities.” A report of the United Nations’ intelligence service CIU shows how confused and contradictory the work of intelligence services in the region can be. According to that report, two CIA agents once protected Haradinaj from an interrogation by taking him to a U.S. base with an Italian military helicopter.

Haradinaj had to step back as Prime Minister of Kosovo only after a few months in office in 2005 after being indicted of crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in the Hague. Serbian officials have claimed that nine of ten witnesses for the prosecution were killed during the trial, though the ICTY has denied these claims. Haradinaj was acquitted by the Hague tribunal in April 2008.