



# KOSOVO

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December 2, 2008

## Germany's Failed Spy Mission in Kosovo

Spiegel

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,593713,00.html>

The ineptitude of three agents in Germany's foreign intelligence agency has endangered one of the organization's most important operations: building up its secret network of informants in Kosovo. It has also strained diplomatic relations between the two countries.

The company is located in one of the better neighborhoods of the Kosovo capital of Pristina, in a large single-family house on a hill overlooking the valley at the edge of town. The white building is surrounded by a wrought iron fence. On a pole near the front entrance hangs a sign with the engraved company logo -- the letters LCAS -- and below that, three bands of color: black, red and gold.

A Mitsubishi Pajero with Munich license plates is parked behind the fence. The curtains are closed, and halogen spotlights with motion detectors have been installed under the eaves. A pair of garden shears is lying in front of the door, and there is a grill on the deck. The rear side of the property, with its neatly mowed lawn, is also fenced in.

The Germans moved in last fall and have always been very friendly, says the neighbor, Hajredin Shale, who also noted that one of them regularly went jogging. But he didn't see much of the three men. He says they lived alone, had no visitors, spoke no Albanian, and never said much more than hello.

Now, Shale's opportunity to get to know his neighbors better has passed. On Saturday, the three men left Pristina on a special flight headed for Berlin. Soon, the trio -- Robert Z., Andreas J. and Andreas D. -- will face a committee of German parliamentarians who have taken an interest in their case. Most likely, they will never return to Kosovo.

### Faces on the Front Pages

And why should they? They entered the country as agents of the Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND), the German foreign intelligence agency. The operation ended with the trio on the evening news and their faces plastered across the front pages of German newspapers. Such attention is hardly a boon for the careers of secret agents.

Police arrested the three Germans nearly two weeks ago under suspicion of throwing explosives at the office of the EU Special Representative in Kosovo on Nov. 14. The release of the three Germans from custody marks the end of an unusual diplomatic spat between Germany and the tiny new Balkan nation. At times, the tone sharply

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transgressed the usually staid diplomatic tenor, says a member of the Kosovo government. At one point, Chancellor Angela Merkel's chief of staff, Thomas de Maizière, warned in a phone call to Prime Minister Hashim Thaçi, that Berlin might consider discontinuing its subsidies.

It remains to be seen how the scandal will affect long-term relations between Berlin and Pristina. However, one thing is already clear. Thanks to the inept behavior of its agents, Germany's foreign intelligence service may have irreparably damaged one of its most important operations.

For a number of years, Kosovo has been a major operational area for the BND. In addition to being politically unstable and located not far from Germany's borders, it is a hotbed of organized crime with links to Germany and is a country where numerous German police officers and soldiers are stationed.

There are no less than three BND departments focusing on Kosovo, including Department Five, responsible for organized crime, the same department that certified in 2005 that Prime Minister Thaçi is a key figure in a Kosovar-Albanian mafia network. At the time, the confidential report was quickly leaked to the media. Thaçi has never forgiven the Germans for that.

### **Reconnaissance Information**

Department Two, responsible for telecommunications surveillance, is also active in the Balkans. In the late 1990s, this section launched operation "Mofa99," in which the Germans tapped phone conversations between members of the controversial Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). The operation was so successful that a number of German technicians were stationed for years in the Macedonian Interior Ministry to work on "Mofa99." Since then, the BND has maintained an extensive network of informants among high-ranking functionaries of the KLA and the Kosovar administration.

When the intelligence agency wanted to sound out the situation for Germany's armed forces, the Bundeswehr, BND President Ernst Uhrlau authorized an additional operation in 2006. Department One was assigned the task of "force protection," gathering as much information as possible to guarantee the security of troops on the ground. Pristina was selected as the base of operations for this top-secret mission. Top brass at the BND were pursuing two objectives: maintaining contacts with informants and gathering reconnaissance information.

The operation was handled by Department 11A, which, according to the secret resource allocation scheme of the BND, is responsible for "supporting Bundeswehr operations and coordinating strategic military reconnaissance." The preparations could begin.

On April 12, 2007, two men, who identified themselves as "Michael Hohenstein" and "Rolf Hagen," registered the company LCAS Logistics-Coordination & Assessment Service Hohenstein & Hagen GmbH at the district court in Munich. The two



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Bavarians indicated that the purpose of the company was to provide “logistical services,” which is not entirely a lie. The company supposedly has only two employees, and is located in an office park with modern glass and steel buildings on the southern edge of Munich, in Ottobrunn.

The building at Alten Landstrasse 23 presents an ideal front for organizations working undercover. There are roughly a dozen computer and design companies, two law firms and a map manufacturer in this unobtrusive office building. A different company can be found behind each door along the long hallway. They all share a small kitchen and the restrooms, but otherwise have nothing to do with each other.

### **Top-Secret Mission**

A sham company like LCAS blends in perfectly. Nobody knows who works here -- or if any work is being done. The sign on the door has now been removed. A young computer specialist from the other side of the hall says that the company has moved, but adds that he has almost never seen anyone there. The office looks, though, as if it has been used. There is a computer on the desk, and a Kandinsky print is hanging on the wall. That's enough to provide a cover for the top-secret Pristina mission of the BND.

This is where the operation began in September, 2007. On Oct. 5, 2007, LCAS was officially registered with startup capital of €2,500 (\$3,175) under registration number 70453415 in the Kosovar capital, and the owner was listed as the parent company in Ottobrunn. The company has no turnover, pays no taxes, and keeps such a low profile that the director of a German employment agency says today: “If this company was active here, I would have known about it.” But the last thing that the young businessmen from Bavaria wanted was publicity for their company.

A total of 11 BND agents were stationed at different times in Pristina. They established contacts, investigated the situation and engaged in cloak and dagger operations -- all under the cover of LCAS. Usually, two to three agents were operating simultaneously on location. The last team consisted of Robert Z., Andreas J. and Andreas D. who, like many of their colleagues, had been reassigned from the Bundeswehr to the German foreign intelligence service.

### **Embarrassing Questions for the BND**

Robert Z., 47, is an experienced agent who has served on a number of foreign missions. He was born in Constance and lives in Baden-Württemberg. He lives an inconspicuous life here with his wife and daughter. The neighbors know that he served in the Bundeswehr, “but only in the reserves.” Actually he does “something with computers,” they say. But his dual identity is revealed on his letter box, where both his real name and codename are visible.



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Z. and his colleagues were part of a mission so secret both the Kosovar government and the official BND attache stationed at the German Embassy in Pristina knew nothing of it. The German ambassador was likewise in the dark.

On Friday, Nov. 14, around 5:30 p.m., an explosive device was detonated in front of the headquarters of the EU mission, known as EULEX. News agencies quickly reported the attack. BND headquarters and Department One in Pullach, near Munich, were alerted. They asked the trio in Pristina to find out what had happened and file a report for the next “intelligence situation” session at the chancellery in Berlin, where a top-flight group of German security officials meets every Tuesday. As BND President, Uhrlau has to personally report on major incidents, and he likes to be armed with exclusive knowledge.

So the three men hopped in their Mitsubishi on that Friday evening and drove off. Shortly before 9 p.m., Andreas J. got out of the vehicle near the scene of the blast to take some pictures. While his two colleagues waited in the car, the agent climbed into the neighboring building, a construction site, which offers an excellent view of the crime scene. But he wasn't alone: Apparently, other intelligence services were keeping the area under surveillance.

### **Confiscated a Notebook**

As he left the building, the BND agent was stopped by a Danish United Nations peacekeeper who asked him what he was doing there. Andreas J. tried to talk his way out of the situation by explaining that he works for the security firm LCAS. He said that he just wanted to take a quick look at the scene of the attack. They were joined by a German UN official. J. was then asked to hand over his passport, and was searched. Investigators also confiscated a notebook.

This highly unfortunate incident raises a number of embarrassing questions for the BND. Why did the agency send its top-secret undercover agents to the scene when any rank amateur would have realized that there was a considerable risk of running into a police patrol? Why wasn't the BND resident dispatched on this job? And why did J. take along his notebook, with all its confidential contents, and break every rule of covert operations?

In the confiscated documents, investigators found the names of Kosovo Prime Minister Thaçi and notes about the situation in Kosovo. For Berlin, the BND notebook represents an important piece of the puzzle, perhaps the key to understanding the case. Was it the notes that attracted the interest of political circles close to Prime Minister Thaçi?

In any case, that night the police let Andreas J. go after he named his two partners as witnesses. They could confirm that he was in his office when the explosion occurred, he said.



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The next day, Saturday, Andreas J. was allowed to pick up his passport. It looked as if everything had been cleared up. But the next Wednesday the three men were unexpectedly arrested around 9 p.m., placed in a small cell, and intensively questioned. At the same time, authorities searched the LCAS company premises. Shortly thereafter, the BND had to admit the true identity of the three agents, threatening an end to one of the agency's most important operations.

The incident jeopardizes the BND's network of informants, which is more extensive in Kosovo than in most countries around the world. Berlin intelligence officials fear that the Kosovo government may now arrest large numbers of informants who have provided the BND with valuable information.

The only small satisfaction for the Germans must be that in Pristina the Kosovars are also looking for a scapegoat for the whole mess. An aide to Prime Minister Thaçi says that at least one important head will roll.

RENATE FLOTTAU, JOHN GOETZ, CONNY NEUMANN, HOLGER STARK,  
ANDREAS ULRICH