

Germany to arrest more suspects after coup plot busts

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Police secures the area after 25 suspected members and supporters of a far-right group were detained during raids, Berlin, Germany December 7, 2022. (Photo by Reuters)

Berlin, December 9 (RHC)-- Germany police chief has said that more arrests were expected after 25 members and supporters of a far-right extremist group were taken into police custody for allegedly plotting to overthrow the state.

"More arrests are likely in the coming days," said Holger Muench, head of the federal police office on Thursday. He told broadcaster ARD that there were now 54 suspects in the case. Meanwhile, German authorities on Thursday ordered 23 people to be held for questioning.

On Wednesday, 3,000 officers conducted raids at 137 sites across 11 German federal states, as well as in Austria and Italy, to arrest members and supporters of the group suspected of plotting to overthrow the government in Berlin by force.

The group, which was linked to a far-right extremist group in the United States, was said to be convinced modern Germany was run by a "deep state" conspiracy that was about to be exposed by an alliance of German intelligence agencies and the militaries of foreign states.

"Everything will be turned upside down: the current public prosecutors and judges, as well as the heads of the health departments and their superiors will find themselves in the dock at Nuremberg 2.0," one of the suspects in the case said in a message posted on Telegram minutes before the start of police crackdown on Wednesday, the newspaper Die Zeit reported.

While the suspects believed their aims could be achieved only by military means and with force, prosecutors said, it was unclear whether the group had managed to amass any serious kind of arsenal to reach their objectives.

Many of the suspects in the case are over 50 years old and some are former members of the military, who have allegedly stolen weapons from the army's arms store during their years in service, while others hold arms licenses. Those arrested, who were mostly members of the far-right movement Reichsbuerger (Citizens of the Reich [empire]), planned to install an aristocrat by the name of Heinrich XIII Prinz Reuss, 71, a descendant of the royal House of Reuss in the eastern state of Thuringia, as leader of a new state.

The suspects included a former senior field officer at the German army's paratrooper battalion, identified as 69-year-old Rüdiger von Pescatore and believed to have been a commander in Calw. Von Pescatore has been accused of being a ring leader of the group.

Heinrich XIII and von Pescatore had founded a "terrorist organization last year with the goal of overturning the existing state order in Germany", prosecutors said. They planned to replace the current government with their own form of state, which was "already in the course of being founded." Von Pescatore had been in charge of planning the military coup while Heinrich XIII was responsible for devising the country's future political structure.

The men had even started to nominate ministers for a transitional post-coup government, according Die Zeit, in which one of the suspects, the former AfD MP Birgit Malsack-Winkemann, 58, a judge by profession, who was arrested at her home in the western Berlin district of Wannsee on Wednesday morning, was to be federal minister for justice.

Prosecutors said Heinrich XIII had made efforts to reach out to the Russians. However, Russia's embassy in Berlin denied any Russian state contact with the group. In a statement, it said, "Russian diplomatic and consulate offices in Germany have no contact to representatives of terrorist groups or other illegal units."

"Of course, this reflects catastrophically on the family," Heinrich XIV, head of the House of Reuss, told broadcaster MDR, speaking about his distant relative with whom he said he had not had contact for 10 years. "For 850 years we were, I think, a tolerant, cosmopolitan royal house in East Thuringia and now we are seen as terrorists and reactionaries all over the world, all the way to America. That's quite terrible," he added.

Investigators found evidence that some members of the group planned to storm the Bundestag (German parliament), seize the lawmakers, and possibly replace it with a Reichstag similar to that of Nazi

Germany.

They said the group was inspired by the deep state conspiracy theories of Germany's Reichsbuerger and America's far-right group QAnon, whose advocates were among those arrested for the January 6, 2021, attack on Capitol Hill.

The police crackdown was the most extensive "executive measures" against the Reichsbuerger ever seen in Germany, an Interior Ministry spokesperson said. Reichsbuerger does not recognize modern-day Germany and its borders as a legitimate state, believing the country is under military occupation.

"The most important consequence is that everyone knows we have a resilient state and democracy whose security organs can penetrate and counter such crimes and plans," Chancellor Olaf Scholz told a news conference on Thursday evening.

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