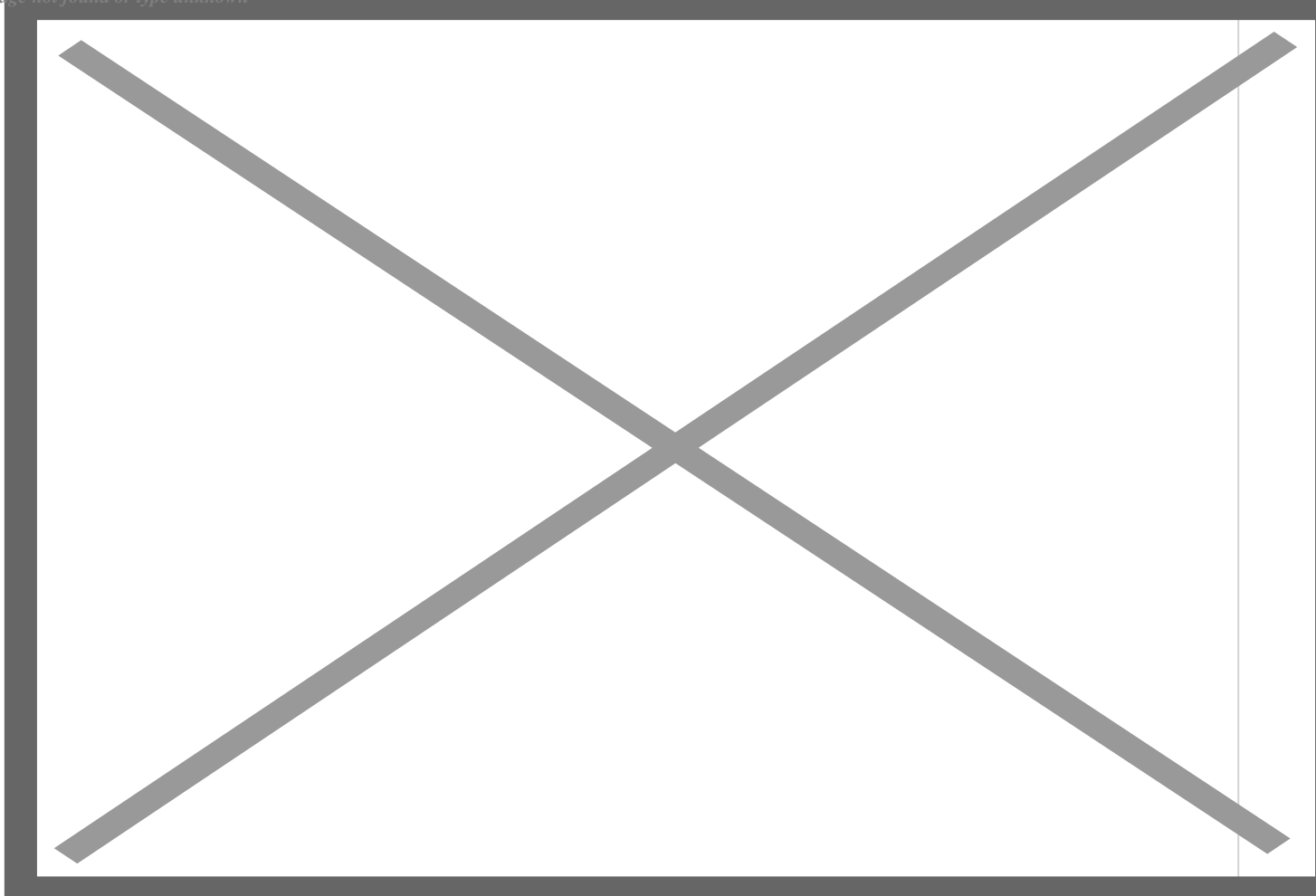


Far-right politician back in German court over use of Nazi slogan

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A boy holds a placard of Bjorn Hocke during a demonstration before the AfD party congress at the Wunderland in Kalkar, western Germany. [Ina Fassbender/AFP]

Berlin, June 24 (RHC)-- A senior member of Germany's far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party is back in court for knowingly using a Nazi slogan for a second time.

Bjorn Hocke went on trial on Monday on charges of using a Nazi-era phrase during a party gathering in his home state of Thuringia in December 2023. Last month, the same court fined him 13,000 euros (about \$14,000) for a previous use of the slogan.

If convicted again, he could face another fine, or up to three years in jail, according to German media. A verdict could come as early as this week.

During the political gathering, Hocke is alleged to have called out the phrase "everything for" in German, inciting the crowd to reply "Germany." The motto, which is banned in Germany along with other Nazi slogans and symbols, was used by the Sturmabteilung paramilitary group that played a key role in Adolf Hitler's rise to power.

In mid-May, the same court convicted Hocke, a former high school history teacher, of knowingly using the slogan during a 2021 campaign rally, ordering him to pay 13,000 euros. The politician argued during the previous hearing that the Nazi-era slogan is an "everyday saying" in Germany and that he was an innocent "law-abiding citizen."

The AfD official's legal troubles come ahead of September's regional elections in the eastern state of Thuringia, in which Hocke plans to run for governor.

The 52-year-old has been the leader of the regional party since its founding in 2013. The branch is officially under surveillance by Germany's domestic intelligence agency as a "proven right-wing extremist" group.

After labelling the Holocaust memorial in Berlin a "monument of shame" and calling for Germany to stop atoning for its Nazi past, a party tribunal rejected a call for Hocke's expulsion in 2018.

Amid gains for far-right parties across the European Union, the German politician's popularity has also been rising regardless of the scandals.

The anti-Islam, anti-immigration candidate could become the first far-right state premier in Germany as a result of the regional elections. Hocke is currently polling in first place in Thuringia, and AfD is expecting strong performances in two other regional elections in eastern Germany in September.

AfD excluded its top candidate Maximilian Krah from the EU parliamentary elections this month due to a string of scandals, including saying Nazi SS members were "not all criminals" and having links with China and Russia.

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