**IN-SESSION RESOLUTION ON ATTACKS AGAINST JOURNALISTS AND THE RISE OF XENOPHOBIA IN GERMANY**

We are deeply concerned by recent attacks against journalists and the rise of far-right extremism in Germany.

On 16 August 2018, a TV crew working for state broadcaster ZDF was prevented from filming a rally by the anti-Islam, nationalist group PEGIDA in Dresden, in the eastern German state of Saxony. They were verbally abused by a man later identified as an off-duty police officer, who reported them to the police and falsely claimed they had broken the law. The journalists were detained for 45 minutes. ZDF called the incident a violation of press freedom.[[1]](#footnote-1) In Chemnitz, also in Saxony, violent protests erupted after a 35-year old man was fatally stabbed on 26 August 2018 and two migrants were arrested in connection with the killing.[[2]](#footnote-2) A dozen journalists said they were physically attacked while covering the events.[[3]](#footnote-3) It reached the point that on 31 August 2018, the German Federation of Journalists (*Deutsche Journalisten-Verband* – DJV) warned its members to be ‘extra careful when reporting on right-wing demonstrations’.[[4]](#footnote-4)

For the past few years, far-right demonstrators in Germany have been calling journalists and the general media ‘*Lügenpresse*’, a derogatory word meaning ‘lying press’. While dating back to the mid-19 century, this term was specifically used during the Nazi era and is still associated with Nazi terminology. In this context, it is of great concern that Hans-Georg Maaßen, former head of Germany’s domestic intelligence agency, questioned the authenticity of video footage showing far-right protesters in Chemnitz chasing down migrants in comments to the tabloid *Bild*, appearing to downplay the violence.[[5]](#footnote-5) He was subsequently forced to step down and offered a new role at the Interior Ministry.

Instead of making unfounded allegations and adding fuel to the fire of public unrest, the German authorities should carry out thorough investigations into incidents of violence and bring the perpetrators to justice. Maaßen could not produce any evidence for his assumption. In making such dangerous speculations, he neglected his job which is to protect the constitution and clear up what actually did happen in Chemnitz – namely, a severe anti-Semitic raid on the Jewish restaurant “Schalom” on the night of August 27th, among other crimes.[[6]](#footnote-6)

We are further concerned by the rise of the far-right movement in Germany. While antisemitism and hateful rhetoric must never be taken lightly, in light – or rather darkness – of German history in the 20th century, heinous words and acts weigh even more heavily. When the German Interior Minister, Horst Seehofer, refers to migration as the ‘mother of all problems’, we believe he is flirting dangerously with Nazi-reminiscent rhetoric, instead of appeasing and restoring public peace.

At a PEN Congress in 1958, Erich Kästner, President of German PEN, whose books were burnt in May 1933, commemorated the 25th anniversary of the Nazi book burnings and warned: ‘*The events of 1933-1945 should have been fought in 1928. Later, it was too late. One must not wait until the fight for freedom is called treason. One must not wait until the snowball has turned into an avalanche. You have to crush the rolling snowball. Nobody will stop the avalanche. (…) You can only fight rising dictatorships before they are in power*.’[[7]](#footnote-7)

We call upon the authorities and public – at this critical time - to do all they can to “crush the rolling snowball” of racism and xenophobia before it “has turned into an avalanche”.

**The Assembly of Delegates of PEN International calls on the German authorities to:**

* Prevent and protect against threats and violence against journalists and other media workers;
* Ensure impartial, prompt, thorough, independent and effective investigations into all alleged crimes and hold those responsible to account;
* Take all possible measures to combat xenophobia, anti-refugee prejudice and racism.

1. Deutsche Welle (DW), PEGIDA protestor in row with reporters was police employee, 22 August 2018: <https://www.dw.com/en/pegida-protester-in-row-with-reporters-was-police-employee/a-45189306> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. BBC, Germany migrants: Protesters face off in Chemnitz, 28 August 2018: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-45395066> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Clear increase in violence against journalists in Germany in 2018, 10 September 2018: <https://rsf.org/en/news/clear-increase-violence-against-journalists-germany-2018%20> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF), 'Be careful out there' German union warns journalists at demonstrations, 31 August 2018: <https://ecpmf.eu/news/threats/be-careful-out-there-german-union-warns-journalists> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The Guardian, Germany's spy agency chief loses job over Chemnitz video claims, 18 September 2018: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/18/germanys-domestic-spy-chief-hans-georg-maassen-chemnitz> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. https://www.dw.com/en/chemnitz-attack-on-jewish-restaurant-it-is-five-past-midnight/a-45421920 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Original quote in German *„Die Ereignisse von 1933-1945 hätten spätestens 1928 bekämpft werden müssen. [...] Man darf nicht warten, bis der Freiheitskampf Landesverrat genannt wird. Man darf nicht warten, bis aus dem Schneeball eine Lawine geworden ist. Man muß den rollenden Schneeball zertreten. Die Lawine hält keiner mehr auf. Sie ruht erst, wenn sie alles unter sich begraben hat. Das ist die Lehre, das ist das Fazit dessen, was uns 1933 widerfuhr.“* Available at <http://www.alwinbinder.de/html/erich_kastner.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)