

Response by the German Federal Government to the Alert issued on the Council of Europe Safety of Journalists Platform "Journalists Stripped of Press Accreditation and Victims of Police Violence During the G20 in Hamburg"

In hosting the G20 Summit in Hamburg on 7 and 8 July 2017, the Federal Government held a major event, which, like all other G20 summits, involved extremely high requirements in terms of organisation, logistics and security. Safeguarding freedom of the press during the event was of paramount importance to the Federal Government. To this end, the Press and Information Office of the Federal Government set up an international media centre in Messe Hamburg directly beside the summit venue for the journalists who came from all over the world to cover the event. In order to create the best possible reporting conditions, this centre included some 1000 work stations, particularly for print journalists, space for the electronic media, television, radio and social media, and briefing and press conference rooms.

The Press and Information Office of the Federal Government opened an accreditation process prior to the summit, as is usual for such major events. This process was open to all journalists who wanted to attend the G20 Summit. Checks were conducted in two stages in this accreditation process. Firstly, the applicant had to provide the Press and Information Office of the Federal Government with proof that he or she worked as a journalist. The main aim here was to ensure that the limited amount of space for the media at the summit venue was duly allocated to journalists only.

The second stage involved a security check, which was carried out – with the permission of the applicant – by the Federal Criminal Police Office. The aim was to ensure that there were no security questions about the applicant which suggested that their proximity to protected persons during the summit gave grounds for concern. Liaising with the Federal Criminal Police Office, the Press and Information Office of the Federal Government weighed the precious asset of freedom of the press against the security of the summit participants, deciding in favour of freedom of the press when in doubt.

Accordingly, none of the applications for accreditation received by the Press and Information Office of the Federal Government by the accreditation deadline of 23 June 2017 were rejected for security reasons. Instead, it was decided in several cases to initially grant accreditation, even if the state security agencies had relevant information at the time of the accreditation. By the end of the entire accreditation process, the Press and Information Office of the Federal Government had given 5101 journalists access to the press centre by granting them accreditation.

However, significant additional security information and the overall assessment of the ongoing developments of the summit situation led to a re-evaluation of the security situation by the security authorities on 6 and 7 July. The security concerns involved, which resulted entirely from information available to the German authorities, had to be taken seriously by the Press and Information Office of the Federal Government with regard to the accreditation that had already been granted. At the advice of and in agreement with the Federal Criminal Police Office, the Press and Information Office of the Federal Government therefore decided to withdraw accreditation from 32 people. In order to implement this decision, the Federal Criminal Police Office forwarded the names of these journalists to the security checkpoints. Accreditation was withdrawn from nine journalists. The other journalists did not appear at the media centre at a later stage.

The reasons for withdrawing accreditation and the concrete circumstances involved are currently being discussed both internally and publicly from many different points of view, as well as with the press associations.

Allegations against the police in the context of the events relating to the G20 Summit are currently under investigation or will be investigated in due course by the relevant state authorities. Furthermore, the German legal system provides ways to apply to administrative courts for legal remedies in cases of alleged violation of the law by police forces. Journalists, as all others who claim to be victims of such acts, can present their allegations personally and in detail, which would help to assess if the police acted correctly.