



Earthquake in German intelligence: former BND chief August Hanning arrested on espionage and treason charges

Published on 08/10/2026

BERLIN – Germany's intelligence services are facing **one of the most serious national security scandals since the end of the Cold War**. Tuesday morning, German police arrested 80-year-old **August Hanning** at his home in Steinfurt (North Rhine-Westphalia), the longtime **former president of the *Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND)* from 1998 to 2005** and subsequently State Secretary at the Interior Ministry from 2005 to 2009 under Angela Merkel's government.

Arrested alongside him was **his former chief of staff**, identified by investigators as **Manfred D.**, accused of supplying Hanning with a continuous stream of highly classified information and documents for more than 15 years.

A systematic arrangement to sell state secrets

According to Germany's Federal Public Prosecutor General, the illicit collaboration between the two allegedly began in the spring of 2010. After Hanning left public office to establish his own private consulting firm, Manfred D. – who continued to serve as chief of staff for three subsequent BND presidents until his retirement in 2026 – allegedly **continued to remove classified material in exchange for cash payments.**

Over the years, Manfred D. would have provided Hanning **nearly 2,000 classified documents:**

- **Documents for the Chancellor:** dossiers and preparatory materials for weekly security and intelligence meetings at the Federal Chancellery.
- **Top-secret dossiers:** materials related to Iran's nuclear program and strategic assessments of the Russian armed forces.
- **Reports from partner agencies:** classified information from allied international intelligence services.



Use of the data and the involvement of foreign powers

The charges brought by prosecutors against August Hanning are extremely serious: espionage on behalf of foreign powers, breach and theft of state secrets, attempted treason, and acting as a secret agent.

According to investigators:

1. **Private consulting and foreign analysis:** Hanning allegedly used the classified information both to enhance his private consulting reports and, in at least one case, to prepare an analysis intended for a member of a foreign intelligence service.

2. **Long-running contact channels:** The former head of the BND allegedly maintained regular contact for several years with an official from another foreign intelligence service, supplying political information based on internal BND reports.
3. **International leads:** Although some of the information reportedly made its way to countries of the former Soviet Union, sources close to the investigation clarify that **Russia does not appear to be directly involved** in this line of inquiry.

The break in the investigation: an "accidental discovery"

The breakthrough that led to the arrest came entirely unexpectedly in September 2025.

Hanning's offices had been searched by the Hamburg public prosecutor's office as part of an entirely unrelated criminal investigation concerning businesswoman Christina Block's legal dispute. During the search, officers happened upon a vast body of highly classified internal BND documents. The material was immediately sent to the Federal Prosecutor's Office in Karlsruhe, which has jurisdiction over crimes against state security.

The consequences for the BND and German politics

Hanning's arrest represents a devastating blow to the credibility and international standing of Germany and the BND. The BND routinely shares highly classified information with foreign agencies such as the U.S. CIA, Britain's MI6, and France's DGSE. Such a prolonged leak at such high levels immediately raises questions among allies **about the agency's resilience and security.**

- **Impact on the government:** Chancellor Friedrich Merz and the current BND director, Martin Jäger, face a delicate political phase. Jäger is seeking to implement a far-reaching reform of the BND to turn it into a more dynamic and responsive service, expanding its operational and cyber capabilities.
- **Parliamentary reactions:** The deputy chairman of the Parliamentary Control Panel on the Intelligence Services (PKGr), Konstantin von Notz (Greens), described the allegations as "serious and far-reaching," calling for swift and complete clarity on the true extent of the damage to national security.

Martin Jäger confirmed that the agency has launched a thorough internal investigation, stating that *"there can be no compromises when it comes to internal security"*.