

DER TAGESSPIEGEL



Translation of

Matthias Meisner und Ulrike Schaffer:

“Deutscher seit mehr als 20 Jahren in US-Haft – Deutsche Politiker kämpfen für die Haftüberstellung von Jens Söring”

Der Tagesspiegel, 18. Juli 2012

Matthias Meisner and Ulrike Schaffer:

“German in US prison for more than 20 years – German politicians fight for transfer of Jens Soering”

Der Tagesspiegel, July 18, 2012

Jens Soering is not lacking for lobbyists in Germany. Christoph Straesser, the Human Rights Spokesperson of the SPD Caucus, has drummed up 54 members of parliament. All of them actively support the German, who has been incarcerated in the USA since 1990 for double murder – and has failed in all his attempts to be transferred from a prison in the Commonwealth of Virginia to Germany.

In June, politicians of all parties collectively wrote a letter to the Governor of Virginia Robert McDonnell, “humbly” requesting the parole or repatriation of Soering as a “sign our friendship.”

The parliamentarians hoped for “a significant humanitarian gesture”; they knew that it would not be easy for him, but for that very reason they would value this gesture “all the more highly.”

Signatories included, among others, the leader of the Greens Claudia Roth, the leader of the Left Gregor Gysi, Minister of Science Annette Schavan (CDU), the former State Minister Gernot Erler (SPD), former Minister of Health Ulla Schmidt (SPD), as well as Tom Koenigs (Greens), Chairman of the Human Rights Committee. They did not receive a reply. From the US-Embassy in Berlin, which also received a copy, they did not even receive an acknowledgment of receipt. According to Straesser, the affair has left him “in despair.” In the final analysis, Straesser told the Tagesspiegel, the quiet diplomacy of the last few years “has produced no results whatsoever, as bitter as it is.” Straesser accused Virginia politicians of being possessed by “sheer vengefulness,” calling them “hard as rocks.”

Soering, son of a German diplomat, born in Bangkok, supposedly murdered the parents of his former girlfriend in 1985 in Detroit. *[N.B.: This is an error; the crime occurred in Bedford County, Virginia.]* He recanted a confession and maintains his innocence. In mid-July a Circuit Court in Richmond denied Soering's application for repatriation. This fall the Virginia Supreme Court will decide whether to hear the appeal. Soering told the "Sueddeutsche Zeitung" soberly that he "cannot afford to dream of a future that I may never have." Soering's [German] attorney Christian Mensching says, even if Soering would be transferred to Germany, there was "no automatism" for a release. An appropriate process would extend over a longer period.

German politicians bravely continue to seek a resolution to the case. The Human Rights Commissioner of the federal government, Markus Loening (FDP), knows Soering personally. He corresponds with him and even visited him in prison – most recently in February 2011. "According to our sense of justice, Soering finished paying for his crime long ago, especially since he was only 18 at the time of the crime," Loening told the Tagesspiegel. In a German court Soering would presumably have been judged under the juvenile law, he added. Whether Soering has any chance of obtaining a repatriation on appeal, Loening feels unable to say. "My hopes are focused on the Virginia Parole Board," he said. There, Soering will have a hearing later this year. If the board were to parole him, Soering would be transferred to Germany and released.

The Vice-President of the federal parliament Bundestag, Katrin Göring-Eckardt (Greens), wrote Soering a letter, expressing hope in a US-decision "in the spirit of transatlantic understanding."

Amnesty International remains reserved. The US-Expert Maya Liebing says that, as can be seen in connection with the death penalty, there are so many problems with the US-criminal justice system that [Soering's] case is not being focused on. While the initiatives in Germany are welcome, Soering is not a "non-violent political prisoner. There are no indications that he is innocent."

[N.B.: The final statement by Ms. Liebing led to a storm of protest by Soering's attorneys and supporters, because the statement is objectively incorrect. Soering's popularity in Germany is largely based on the fact that there is evidence of innocence. Last year, new DNA tests were made public which revealed that, of the 42 blood samples from the crime scene, none could be linked to Soering – and 11 of the 42 definitely belonged to someone else. In an article published one month earlier, on June 18, 2012, the same newspaper "Der Tagesspiegel" wrote, "What is beyond doubt, however, is that he should never have been convicted."]