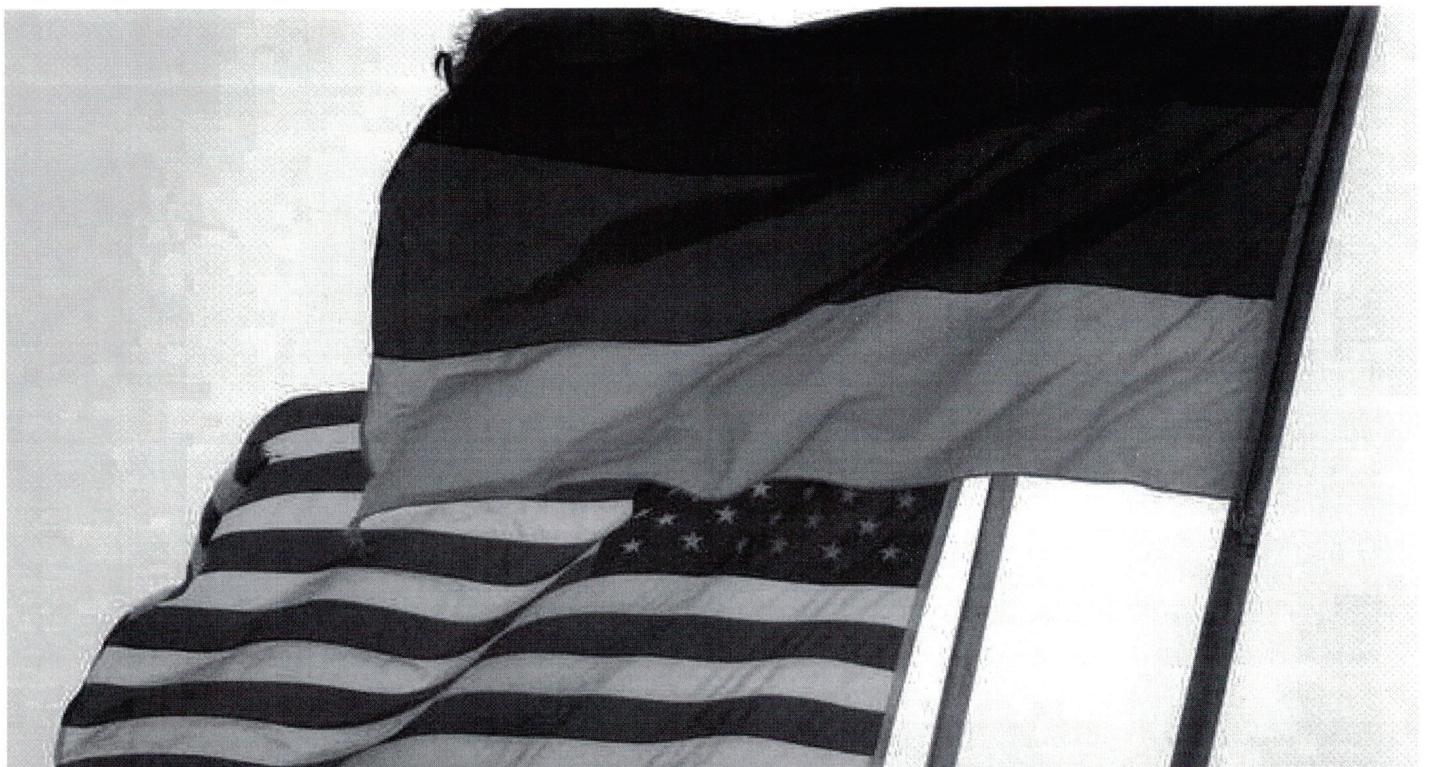




Audit: Under Murphy, U.S. Embassy in Germany wasn't 'proactive' with harassment claims



“Let me be absolutely and unequivocally clear: This never should have happened,” Gov. Phil Murphy, a Democrat, said. | Getty Images | Getty

By **KATHERINE LANDERGAN**

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A State Department inspector general's report on U.S. diplomatic operations in Germany in 2011 — when Gov. Phil Murphy served as ambassador there — said

the embassy and consulates were not “attentive” or “proactive” in dealing with harassment claims.

According to the audit from the U.S. Office of the Inspector General, harassment reports were more prevalent at the U.S. Embassy in Berlin, and most often revolved around “gender or sexual orientation.”

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“Some allegations of racial and sexual harassment within the mission have not been addressed effectively,” the audit states. In fact, the audit states, policies about harassment or discrimination were not posted anywhere in the embassy’s three office buildings or on the mission’s private web page.

But a follow-up report in February 2013 said corrective action was taken, and that that embassy complied with recommendations from the audit. Separately, a former embassy official told POLITICO on Monday that Murphy always made sure “immediate action” was taken on any harassment complaints.

The audit, which is publicly available at the U.S. Department of State, is making the rounds in New Jersey government as Murphy deals with a growing scandal surrounding his administration’s decision to hire a campaign aide who had faced an allegation of sexual assault.

The governor, at a press conference Monday ahead of a nine-day overseas trade mission that will include a stop in Germany, said he has ordered an investigation into how his aides handled the matter involving Albert J. Alvarez.

He said he was prepared to change state law to ensure nothing like it happens again.

“Let me be absolutely and unequivocally clear: This never should have happened,” Murphy, a Democrat, said. “In this instance, the hiring process of the transition did not reflect our values or the seriousness with which we believe allegations of assault should be taken, period.”

As former President Barack Obama’s ambassador to Germany from 2009-2013, Murphy oversaw the U.S. presence there. He lived and spent most of his time in Berlin, the capital.

The inspector general’s office found 10 complaints in 2011 that were related to harassment or discrimination across all the consulates and embassy in Germany. Of the 10 complaints, four were referred to the Office of Civil Rights in the Department of State. Audit inspectors interviewed several other employees who reported that they, too, had been harassed by supervisors or coworkers but did not file complaints.

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The audit is largely sparse on detail about the claims, although it does mention one incident, in Hamburg, where an employee had been “engaging in verbal harassment, including racial epithets against coworkers for more than 3 years.”

“Several American officers had been aware of the problem but they had not addressed it,” the report said of the incident.

But a former senior embassy official who served in Germany at the same time as Murphy said Murphy always made sure “immediate action” was taken on any complaints. Murphy was often involved in the major cases, but would not know the names of the people involved, due to the confidential nature of the matters, the former official said.

“[Murphy] deals with every issue right away and as soon as he hears about it,” the former official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said.

One major hurdle was finding enough volunteers to work as counselors handling the complaints, the official said, an issue that was corrected after the 2011 audit was released.

The report also mentions that one counselor who was appointed in September 2010 tried to provide sensitivity training to embassy staff. The counselor was told by the previous human resources officer that “training was unnecessary,” the audit states.

The deputy chief of mission, who is the number two diplomat after the ambassador, directed mandatory training to begin in January 2011, according to the audit. At the time the audit was conducted, however, it appeared that less than 50 percent of the staff had attended the training.

The follow-up compliance review in 2013, the final year of Murphy’s ambassadorship, found that the embassy had complied with audit’s recommendations to provide equal employment opportunity training for all employees. Beyond that, the review said, the embassy “also made a concerted effort to demonstrate the mission leadership’s commitment to upholding EEO principles throughout Mission Germany.”

Dan Bryan, a Murphy spokesman, told POLITICO that “the United States has nearly 300 embassies, consulates, and diplomatic missions across the world, including tens of thousands of foreign service officers, civil service employees, and local staff. Nearly all of these missions handle EEO complaints, like any other workplace. During Ambassador Murphy’s tenure in Germany, the U.S.

Mission in Germany processed a handful of EEO complaints, which were appropriately and swiftly handled by EEO officers under the direction of the Deputy Chief of Mission and senior mission management.”

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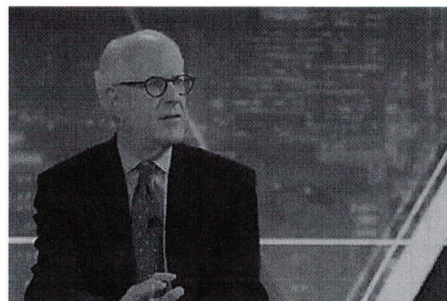
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