

Europe Monitoring

No. 18 in 2022



European Union

Demands of re-thinking gas deals with Qatar

In connection with the lobbying and corruption scandal in the European Parliament, there are now calls to reconsider the gas deals that EU member states had concluded with Qatar. Last Friday, Eva Kaili, Vice-President of the European Parliament, was arrested by the Belgian police on suspicion of corruption. "Several pockets full of banknotes" were found during a search of the politician's private apartment. That was enough to arrest her. Parliamentary immunity does not protect MPs if there is a strong suspicion of a crime and there is a risk of collusion. She was expelled from her PASOK party on Friday evening and her membership of the Socialist



Eva Kaili with the Qatari Labor Minister in Doha in October this year / Photo: Reuters via Twitter

Group in the European Parliament was suspended. On Saturday evening, she was stripped of all powers and duties as Vice President, a spokesman for the European Parliament said.

On Monday, parliament voted her out of office as Vice President with only one dissenting vote. As an elected member of parliament, however, she cannot lose her mandate; she can only give it up voluntarily.

In the course of the corruption scandal in the European Parliament, the Greek authorities have frozen all the assets of the arrested Vice President. On Wednesday, a Belgian judge will decide whether the detention should be continued. The corruption scandal in the EU Parliament could now have consequences for EU energy policy. MEP Dennis Radtke is questioning the gas contracts with the emirate.

"We have to ask ourselves whether the West wants to continue supporting this corrupt regime in the Gulf with its billions of euros for gas purchases, or whether business relationships shouldn't be better frozen due to the current situation," Radtke explained on Monday.

Qatar announced at the end of November that it would be supplying up to two million tonnes of liquefied natural gas (LNG) to Germany every year from 2026. The German Economics Minister Robert Habeck (Greens) visited Qatar at the beginning of the year and held political talks. During his visit to Qatar in September, Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD) then spoke of progress in the negotiations on liquid gas deliveries.

Berlin's Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock (Greens) called for a "complete clarification" of the corruption scandal surrounding Qatar. "This is really an incredible incident that must now be cleared up without any ifs or buts and with the

full force of the law," she said on Monday on the sidelines of the EU foreign ministers' meeting in Brussels.

There would have to be "consequences in different areas," said Baerbock. In this case it is about "the credibility of Europe". For example, a postponement of negotiations on visa facilitation for Qatar is under discussion.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell called the allegations against EU Parliament Vice-President Eva Kaili "worrying". "These are very serious allegations," he said.

New sanctions against Iran

The Iranian regime continues to rely on the greatest brutality and has had a second participant in the street protests executed. 23-year-old Mashid Reza Rahnaward was publicly hanged in Mashhad last Monday. In a more than dubious legal process, he was found guilty of the "war against God" and sentenced to death by hanging - a standard formulation for resistance to the Islamist regime in Tehran. It brands the mostly young demonstrators as "terrorists" who could have been bought



German Foreign Minister Baerbock with her Finnish colleague Haavisto / Photo: AP

off by enemy states such as the US or European governments to stir up trouble and harm the Islamic Republic.

Also on Monday, the foreign ministers of the 27 EU member states in Brussels unanimously decided on new punitive measures against Iran. They are said to meet around 20 people and an organization responsible for serious human rights violations in the country. The EU foreign ministers spoke of "incredible crimes" and an "undisguised attempt at intimidation" by the regime. In addition, further sanctions were decided against Iran because of the support of the Russian war against

Ukraine. Iran responded with counter-sanctions, including against politicians from the EU area.

Sweden

New government introduces migration law

After Denmark, where the goal of "zero migration" was announced years ago and the hurdles for naturalization were raised significantly, Sweden has also begun to tighten its migration and integration policy. The new government has turned things around in the country that has long had the most liberal immigration policy in Europe.

With the new conservative governing coalition, over which Sweden's right-wing nationalists will have considerable influence for the first time, this development is likely to intensify further.

The change had already begun in 2015, when more than 160,000 people came to Sweden in the course of the migration crisis, which means that Sweden took in more people per capita than any other European country. The then social-democratic government tightened the asylum law for the first time.

Stockholm also abolished the permanent right to stay after three decades and last summer turned the temporary solution into a legally anchored one. The right-wing Sweden Democrats had called for even stricter rules, including for Swedish citizenship.

The party managed for the first time to forge a right-wing conservative alliance with moderates, Christian Democrats and liberals in the wake of debates about high crime rates and the erosion of the welfare state due to excessive immigration figures. It finally emerged from the elections in September as the second strongest force.

And although the Sweden Democrats are not formally part of the new government, the planned coalition led by the moderate leader Ulf Kristersson will not achieve a majority in the Reichstag without them, giving the right-wing populists greater power.

In addition to abolishing permanent residence permits, the anti-immigrant party wants to ensure that people can be naturalized after ten years at the earliest, instead of the previous five years or three in exceptional cases. The basic requirements for the application are also to be increased, for example in terms of language level

and cultural knowledge, which are to be queried in tests, which is different from what was previously the case.



Prime Minister Kristersson (r.) with the head of the Sweden Democrats Åkesson / Photo: AFP

Although Sweden is still naturalizing the most foreigners in Europe, a declaration of intent by the new governing coalition indicates that after the change in migration policy, new conditions could soon apply in terms of citizenship.

In mid-October, the new coalition partners laid the foundation for their future cooperation in the so-called Tidö Agreement, named after the castle in which the parties had agreed on several intersections. The topics of migration and integration play a central role in this.

Germany

New migration law causes debates

In the dispute over simplifying naturalization law, Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD) has sided with Interior Minister Nancy Faeser (SPD). "Nine million citizens live and work in our country without having German citizenship. But a democracy thrives on the opportunity to have a say. This creates legitimacy and increases the acceptance of state decisions," said Scholz in Berlin. Faeser's plans to allow naturalization after five years instead of eight, and in exceptional cases after three years, had previously met with criticism from the opposition, but also from the liberal coalition partner. Scholz referred to the lack of skilled workers and called for Germany to be made more attractive as an immigration country. The integration of immigrants works best via the labor market. "Removing hurdles and delays on the way to the job market is therefore good for our country and good for those who want to live and work here,"

Scholz emphasized. A spokesman for Interior Minister Faeser pointed out that the plans for simplified naturalization are merely a project of the coalition agreement between the SPD, the Greens and the FDP.

In the coalition agreement, the partners had agreed on the creation of a "modern" nationality law with the possibility of naturalization "usually" after five years, agreed after three years "in the case of special integration achievements". At the end of 2021, a good 72 million people with German citizenship and around eleven million with foreign citizenship were living in Germany. Most of them, almost six million, had been in Germany for more than ten years.



Erdogan and Scholz Photo: German Government

Faeser's plan aims to speed up the integration of migrants. In addition to shorter waiting times before naturalization, the reform also provides for the abolition of a principle of German law: avoiding multiple citizenships. The aim of the reform is to "generally allow multiple nationalities," says the paper. In practice, that was the norm anyway. Last year, the multi-state quota for naturalizations was almost 70 percent.

