

Europe Monitor

No. 1 in 2023



European Union

New details in „Qatargate“

Anyone who speaks to parliamentarians or EU employees these days feels horrified. Standard question they get to hear: Do you also have packets of cash lying around? All prejudices against the “Brussels” system seem to be confirmed. One hand washes the other here, that’s how it looks now.

The scandal surrounding the lobbyist and former MEP Panzeri, which became known after the police raid in Brussels on December 9, is now often called “Qatargate”. The face of the scandal is the Greek Eva Kaili, who, as Vice President of the European Parliament, showed conspicuous proximity to the emirate and aggressively represented its interests before the World Cup - according to investigators presumably with bribes that Panzeri got from Qatar. The second strand of the scandal leads to Morocco, it is older and may reach deeper into the European Parliament, which is why “Moroccogate” is at least as painful for the EU as the Qatari trail.

In interviews with the police, Panzeri apparently attaches great importance to the fact that he only received money from Morocco and Qatar after leaving parliament in 2019. According to the Belgian newspaper *Le Soir*, the Moroccan EU embassy established very special contacts with MP Panzeri back in 2011. Preparations were apparently being made for Panzeri’s trip to Morocco, and he should definitely visit the Tindouf refugee camp in the Algerian desert on the occasion. A

particularly sophisticated form of image cultivation: after Tindouf, people from Western Sahara, which was annexed by Morocco but was striving for independence, are fleeing, and Panzeri’s visit was intended to document his neutrality in the conflict - even though the Kingdom of Morocco knew he was on its side.

In the scandal surrounding an alleged influence from the Gulf Emirate of Qatar on political decisions in the European Parliament, the partner of the deposed Vice President of the European Parliament, Eva Kaili, made a confession. The Italian Francesco Giorgi admitted to the investigators that he had accepted black money, reports the Italian daily “*La Repubblica*”.



Francesco Giorgi / Photo: Instagram

Giorgi admitted to being part of an organization used by Morocco and Qatar to interfere and influence European affairs. His job was to manage cash. According to Belgian newspapers, Giorgi has also hinted that he suspects Andrea Cozzolino and Marc Tarabella, both MEPs from the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, of ac-

cepting money through former Italian MEP Antonio Panzeri. Morocco is said to be involved in the alleged bribery affair via its external information service Dged. Documents seen by the two newspapers show that Panzeri, Cozzolino and Giorgi were in contact with the Dged and Abderrahim Atmoun, the Moroccan ambassador to Poland. The files of the Brussels investigators who are investigating the corruption scandal in the European Parliament also include photos from the entrance hall of a luxury hotel in the Belgian capital. You can see two men, Antonio Panzeri and Francesco Giorgi.

The recordings come from the surveillance cameras of the Steigenberger Wiltcher's, apparently the favorite house of visiting Qatari dignitaries in Brussels. Panzeri is seen in the pictures arriving at the hotel with a briefcase, which investigators believe appears to be empty. Giorgi is wearing a sleeveless down jacket, it is October 10, 2022, 5:30 p.m., he is pushing a stroller in front of him. In the car is his daughter, whom he has with his partner Eva Kaili, the Greek Vice President of the European Parliament who has since been deposed. The daughter was twenty months old at the time.

In the same minutes, three black limousines pull up, all with Qatari diplomatic license plates. An employee is holding a thick briefcase in his hand, which the investigators suspect is the cash. The meeting is taking place in a suite on the fourth floor of the hotel, where the Qatari Minister of Labor, Ali bin Samikh al-Marri, is staying and he is concerned about his country's image so close to the World Cup. The many reports on the working conditions of South Asian migrant workers on the emirate's construction sites spoil the country's major PR campaign.

The two Italians drive up to the fourth floor, Giorgi pushes the stroller into the elevator. Half an hour later you can see him again in the lobby: he gives the pram with the daughter to an acquaintance who is expecting her and goes upstairs again. Then, after another hour, the Italians leave the hotel, the meeting is over. The Belgian investigators think Panzeri's briefcase is now fuller.

France

Verdicts in trial of terror attack in Nice

The criminal trial in Paris on the suspected terrorist attack on the Promenade des Anglais in Nice on July 14, 2016 came to an end at the end of December with the closing words of the seven accused. An eighth defendant was tried in absentia. The bloodbath on the boulevard on the Côte d'Azur had shaken France.

The youngest of the three main defendants, 27-year-old Ramzi Arefa, used his last appearance before the judges to openly admit his guilt. "I've said it over and over again, I'm guilty of selling a gun without thinking about it," he said. The Franco-Tunisian is accused of having obtained the murder weapon for Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel. The Tunisian-born assassin Lahouaiej-Bouhlel drove a truck down the boulevard on the evening of the national holiday, killing 86 people and injuring 400 others. When passers-by tried to stop him from continuing his journey, he took up arms. Lahouaiej-Bouhlel was eventually killed in a shootout with police.



The terror night in Nice / Photo: Sasha Goldsmith

The other four defendants, all of Albanian nationality, apologized to the victims. "I am very sorry," said 44-year-old Aran Henaj, according to his interpreter's translation. Henaj had sold the Ramzi Arefa automatic pistol that Lahouaiej-Bouhlel used on July 14 to target security forces and passers-by. Henaj's former wife, 48-year-old Enkeljeda Zace, vowed to get better. "This process was very tough for everyone, especially for the joint plaintiffs," she said. From now on, she wants to "take the right path". "I am very sorry for the victims and the families of the joint plaintiffs," said Endri Elezi, who was involved in the arms deal. "I have faith in your justice. My fate is in your

hands.” Maksim Celaj wished the joint plaintiffs “luck” and asked the court for “forgiveness for his mistakes”.

Applause erupted in the courtroom as the presiding judge sentenced one of the accused to 18 years in prison. The court convicted him of membership in a terrorist organization, as did another of the eight accused, who are believed to be accomplices and supporters. Both would have supported and inspired the assassin morally and materially.

According to the public prosecutor’s office, the two defendants, who were sentenced to 18 years in prison, knew about the man’s attitude and that he was capable of committing an attack. They are said to have been involved in the search for a weapon.

The court also sentenced the man who got the gun used in the attack to 12 years in prison. The other five accused in the process, who were also involved in the procurement of the pistol or another weapon according to the verdict, are said to be in prison for between two and eight years. The defendants can still appeal the court’s decision. The fact that the public prosecutor’s office admitted to official mistakes and apologized for them may have exceeded the expectations of many survivors and those left behind. The verdict now marks an important step for them. Nevertheless, numerous victims hope that the legal work-up is not over, because the question of security precautions in Nice was only marginally dealt with in the Paris proceedings. Investigations are still ongoing in the Mediterranean city, and numerous victims are hoping for a second trial.

Germany

New democracy law by German government also sponsors dubious institutions

Under the title “Democracy Promotion Act”, the federal government will provide more support for projects against extremism and for political education and training in hundreds of cities and communities. The Federal Cabinet passed a corresponding draft law at the beginning of the month.

The two responsible ministers, Nancy Faeser (SPD, Interior) and Lisa Paus (Greens, Family), introduced their presentation of the proposed law in a press conference with long explanations of the large “Reichsbürger” raid and xenophobic murders of the past decades. These threats required not only action by security agencies, but also an “engaged civil society,” Paus said. The law would strengthen those who “oppose offenders and promote diversity”.



Ministers Faeser (le.) and Paus during the press conference / Photo: Janine Schmitz/photothek.de

Above all, it is about permanent financing of the currently around 600 projects and organizations that are supported by their family ministry with the “Living Democracy” program, as well as a few dozen other projects under the sovereignty of the ministries for social affairs and the interior. Faeser added: “Today is a good day for democracy, for a long time we lived in the belief that democracy is a matter of course.” However, this year shows that democracy must be actively protected from enemies of the constitution. “Our state has enemies. These enemies of the state wanted to use force of arms to shake our state.” Among others, the Islamic initiative Claim benefits from the “democracy promotion” as one of the supporting organizations of the “Competence Network Islamophobia and Muslim Hostility”,

which will receive more than 555,000 euros from the “Living Democracy” budget in 2022. This involves, for example, the establishment of reporting offices for Islamophobia and the documentation of corresponding processes.

According to Claim’s own website, the definition used by Claim for which actions and attitudes are classified as anti-Muslim was drawn up by political scientist Farid Hafez. Accordingly, the ban on the Islamic veil in some professions falls under

“anti-Muslim racism”, although the ban on headgear applies to all employees in these sectors. Islam experts consider Hafez to be an actor in political Islam. It is also known that Hafez’s work is funded by the Turkish SETA Foundation, which is attributed to the AKP and President Erdogan. The EU canceled funding for the European Islamophobia Reports published by Hafez after it became known that they were co-financed by SETA, which is closely linked to the Turkish government.

