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Europa

Morocco first Arab country to ship arms to Ukraine

Morocco has so far been neutral in the Ukraine war. But now the kingdom is the first African and Muslim country to deliver battle tanks to Kiev and is clearly taking the side of the attacked. Those tanks are T-72 that Morocco received from Belarus 30 years ago. The Czech company Excalibur modernized them in December. Each tank now has improved thermal imaging technology, night vision, armor and is now already in the front line.



Photo: Zumapress

At the time, Excalibur said it would send an additional 90 "African" tanks to Ukraine as part of the buildup, based on a US-Dutch-funded 2.2 billion Czech koruna (\$97 million) deal.

Apparently, Morocco is ready to give up more of its approximately 280 Russian-built tanks. For Ukraine this is a godsend. Because the delivery also includes spare parts that they urgently need

for their large fleet of Russian tanks.

For the North African kingdom, military support for Ukraine is a political about-face. In March, the country abstained from voting at the UN General Assembly condemning Russian aggression in Ukraine.

Morocco initially wanted to remain neutral, like many other Arab states. One reason for Morocco's rethinking is likely to be deteriorating relations with Algeria. The neighboring state is a loyal ally of Russia and also a financier of the Polisario. Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune was unenthusiastic about American recognition of Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara. Algeria ended diplomatic relations on the grounds of "hostile actions" by Morocco. This is the only way to "avoid a war," Tebboune said. The President also closed the gas pipeline to Morocco, which leads to Spain. Direct air traffic to the neighboring Moroccan state was canceled. The last turbulence came on the occasion of the African Nations Cup, which took place in Algeria in January. Tebboune turned down a request from the Moroccan Football Federation to bring his national team to Algeria on a direct Royal Air Maroc flight. Rabat then canceled his participation in the tournament.

Qatargate: More arrests of MEPs

The two MEPs Marc Tarabella and Andrea Cozzolino have been arrested in the EU corruption scandal. After the Belgian Tarabella had been arrested in Brussels and interrogated by the public prosecutor's office, the Italian police arrested Cozzolino

shortly thereafter. He had been treated in Naples and was taken into custody by the financial police when leaving the hospital, as Italian media reported unanimously.

The two MEPs - who were recently expelled from the Social Democrats group and had their immunity revoked by Parliament - are accused of having been paid by third countries. They each protest their innocence.



Marc Tarabella / Photo: AFP

In December, the EU Parliament was shaken by the corruption scandal involving then-Vice President Eva Kaili. She lost her job on suspicion of corruption. The judiciary charges Kaili and other suspects with involvement in a criminal organization, money laundering and corruption. It is about alleged influence on decisions by Qatar and Morocco.

Tarabella was questioned in Brussels by investigators who also searched his office in the European Parliament and other business premises. The investigators also went to Cozzolino's office in Brussels. Meanwhile, he was taken to a prison in Naples, according to the Ansa news agency, citing legal sources. Both politicians and their possible role in the scandal had been reported since December. At the beginning of February, their immunity was lifted so that the public prosecutor's office can investigate.



Andrea Cozzolino / Photo: AP

Austria

Convictions in the Vienna Terror Trial

Before the verdict was pronounced, the defendants spoke one last time. One of the main defendants, Arijanit F. said: "My deepest condolences to the bereaved who have been neglected so far." He spoke of the problem that he used to be "brother and brother" with everyone and also met many "assholes" in the process His car, with which he chauffeured the later assassin to Slovakia, was his "pride," a dream that he was able to fulfill with jobs alongside his apprenticeship. He doesn't want to have known the terrorist that well, on top of that he was a very reserved character. Had he known about the attack plans, "I would have reported it, but something like that". The two accused Ismail B. and Burak K. decided not to say anything more. The fourth accused, Heydayatollah Z., picked up the microphone again: "I have a criminal record, I made mistakes," he said. It was about assault, robbery and drugs. Terrorist crimes have not been an issue so far. He also doubted his DNA traces, which were secured on all weapons. "I'm innocent," Z. told the jury. Z. did not mention the attack with a syllable.

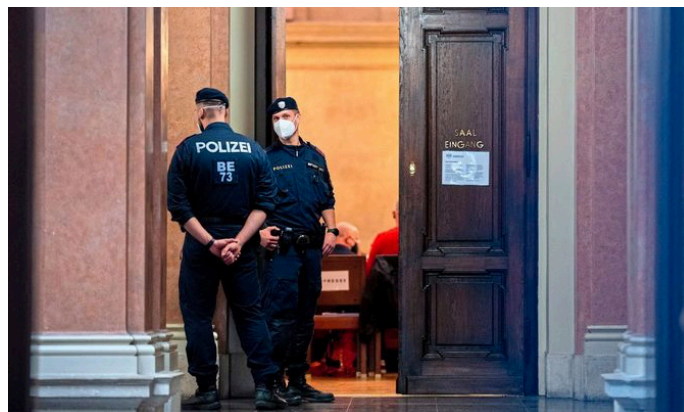


Photo: APA

The fifth defendant, the arms broker Adam M., in turn "certainly never" claims to have had anything to do with terrorism, "nor will I". Neither the FBI nor the Office for the Protection of the Constitution found anything about it. He was security, guarded Hollywood stars and hospitals, worked at Raiffeisen as an event manager and set up barricades at marathons "so that no car could pass". "Had I known what he [the assassin] was capable of, I would never have passed the damn number on," the assassin's childhood friend Ishaq F.

concluded the closing round. F. ultimately put the line to the accused Adam M from prison. "I have to live with it, thank you."

An investigative report on the Islamist attack in 2021 revealed serious failures by the Austrian security authorities. According to the first report by a government investigative committee, the authorities had missed several opportunities to recognize the danger posed by the later assassin and to react to it.

After the young Islamist was released from prison in December 2019, it took until October for a risk assessment to be completed, the report said. Accordingly, the 20-year-old from North Macedonia posed a "high risk".

He had been sentenced to the previous prison term for attempting to travel to Syria to fight alongside IS. However, he did not have to serve the full 22-month sentence. In early December 2019, he was released early from prison after apparently feigning successful participation in a deradicalization program.

The authors of the report criticized the fact that almost ten months had elapsed before the risk assessment was carried out. The threat had already become clear in July when he met well-known German and Swiss Islamists. According to the report, the Vienna State Office for the Protection of the Constitution and Counter-Terrorism (LVT) blamed a lack of resources and overwork for the delay.

France

International conference in Paris wants to support Lebanon - Qatar as a source of instability

In Paris, delegations from six countries wanted to find a way out of the political and financial crisis that has gripped Lebanon since 2019. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the US and France are likely to put heavy pressure behind closed doors on government officials and the delegations of the various political camps from Lebanon. Because the current political vacuum is preventing the drastic economic reforms demanded by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The Lebanese pound has lost more than 95 percent of its value in three years.

At the last international Lebanon conference con-

vened by French President Emmanuel Macron in Beirut, the participating countries pledged \$370 million in humanitarian aid. The whereabouts of the funds is largely unclear. According to a recent study by the World Bank, more than 70 percent of the 5.6 million Lebanese live below the poverty line in their homeland and have less than 14 dollars a day. But since former President Michel Aoun left the presidential palace in October at the end of his mandate, political apathy has prevailed. Many Lebanese try to emigrate because of the daily power cuts lasting several hours and the loss of their savings.



Photo: Deutschlandradio

Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states have scaled back investments and political ambitions. The exception is Qatar, which, alongside the former colonial power France, has blossomed into the most influential power broker in Lebanon. Lebanese politicians regularly travel to Doha, which has also paid the poorly equipped Lebanese army several times.

The state-owned energy giant Qatar Energy took over the Russian stake in a consortium of companies that intends to extract gas off the Lebanese coast in the future. With rare unity, the otherwise hostile political camps approved a contract with Israel for production from the huge gas field last year.

Qatar's engagement is changing the complicated balance of power in the multi-religious state. While Saudi Arabia openly supported the Sunni militias and parties and fought the influence of the Iran-friendly Shia Hezbollah militia, Qatar is considered a partner of Iran and Hezbollah.