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European Union

Qatargate: Kaili will be placed under house arrest and released from custody

Eva Kaili, one of the main suspects in the European Parliament corruption scandal, is being transferred from prison to house arrest pending trial. This was announced yesterday by the Belgian judicial authorities.

Kaili, former Vice-President of the European Parliament, was among the first to be arrested in December.

The so-called Qatargate probe also implicated Kaili's partner Francesco Giorgi and several other current and former MEPs, including former Italian

tained her innocence throughout the trial.

Following Wednesday's decision, Kaili will soon join her fellow suspects with an electronic tag under house arrest and exit the prison north of Brussels.

EU Parliament passes migration package

The Home Affairs Committee of the European Parliament, with a majority of Christian Democrats, Social Democrats and Liberals, introduced four laws that formulate common procedures for the reception, registration, distribution and deportation of migrants. The laws come from the Pact for Migration and Asylum, which the EU Commission presented two and a half years ago as lessons learned from the migration crisis of 2015 and 2016. The negotiations failed at the first attempt because Hungary and Poland refused to contribute to the reception of refugees. After that, the pact fell out of sight because the number of immigrants fell. Now the subject is coming back with a vengeance, and time is of the essence.

Parliament and the member states agreed last year to bring the new asylum legislation through before the elections to the European Parliament in spring 2024. To do this, negotiations between the two institutions would have to start in the summer at the latest - but the 27 governments have still not found a common position. The laws provide that the states on the external borders, such as Italy, do more tasks. Accelerated asylum procedures including faster deportation at the border are planned. The Italian govern-



Eva Kaili / Photo: European Parliament

MP Pier Antonio Panzeri - the suspected ringleader of a bribery network who struck a deal with Belgian investigators in January.

Since then, all suspects detained have been released with an electronic surveillance tag, Kaili being the last to remain in prison. She has main-

ment is currently simply sending on the majority of refugees who come across the Mediterranean without registering them. In doing so, they are violating applicable EU regulations. It will only assume additional responsibility if it can be sure that it can then build on the solidarity of other countries when taking on refugees.

Israel

Former Foreign Minister: Above all, the Saudi-Iran deal shows the failure of Israeli foreign policy

This is how Yair Lapid, former Israeli Foreign Minister and Prime Minister, comments on the agreement between Tehran and Riyadh, which so far is nothing more than the resumption of diplomatic relations after seven years. A settlement of the numerous conflicts between Riyadh and Tehran is still a long way off.



Yair Lapid / Photo: YW3

In any case, the effect of the announcement from Beijing goes far beyond the two Gulf states. It is closely followed in the region – and judged very differently. Lapid's accusation against the Netanyahu government is that instead of approaching Riyadh with the backing of the Biden administration, the right-wing national alliance relied on confrontation to push through the anti-democratic judicial reform - that didn't go down well in either Washington or Riyadh.

However, Lapid's reading of Gulf diplomacy has a catch: the Gulf state has long since taken the Saudi step with the United Arab Emirates (UAE), with which Israel has intensified relations most rapidly in recent years.

Tunisia/Europe

Fear of collapse

France and Italy want a European aid initiative for Tunisia to stem the flow of migrants. In addition, the EU and the US consider the situation in the North African country to be very worrying. "If the country collapses economically or socially, new flows of migrants will come to Europe," said EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell. US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken warned that the Tunisian economy is in danger of "falling into the abyss" if an agreement with international donors is not reached soon.

The government in Tunis angrily rejected these statements as "disproportionate" and preferred to praise the "resilience of the Tunisian people". By the end of 2022, the new \$1.9 billion vital loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) appeared to be in the bag. But the government has fallen behind on its commitments, particularly on reducing fuel subsidies and the promised state-owned companies law. President Saïed makes no move to sign the contract with the IMF. Now France and Italy are trying to help with a European initiative. French President Emmanuel Macron said it would have to be "very short-term to stop the flow of migrants from Tunisia".

Paris promises 250 million euros if the IMF agreement is concluded. Italy suggested Saudi Arabia could help. The Tunisian newspaper "Achourouk" criticized that Europe wanted less to save the country from bankruptcy than to encourage the migrants to be stopped. But Tunisia is not "the gendarme of the Mediterranean".

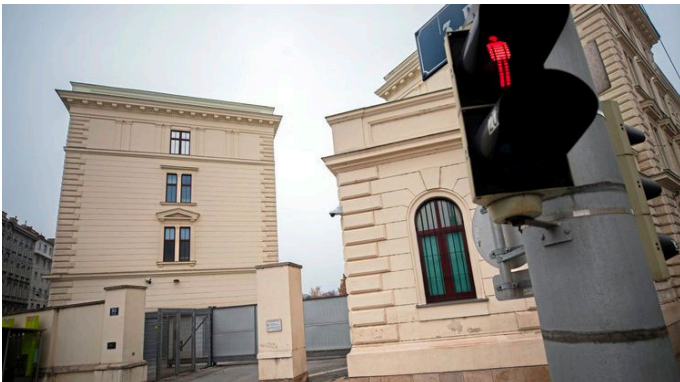


Photo: Dennis Jarvis

Austria

Former intelligence heads facing trial

In connection with a secret service action by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution and Terrorism (BVT), which has since been dissolved, four former top officials of the BVT and a high-ranking representative of the Federal Office for Migration Law and Asylum (BFA) at the relevant time have to answer to the Vienna Regional Court for abuse of office. This was announced by a court spokeswoman. For the time being, five hearing dates have been fixed.



Former HQ of BVT in Vienna / Photo: APA

The prosecution of the Office of the Public Prosecutor for Economic Affairs and Corruption (WKStA) once brought charges against the highest level of intelligence service, namely a former BVT department head, a Ex-BVT chief of espionage and two chief inspectors. They are accused of having accommodated a general of the Syrian state security in Austria in the course of the “White Milk” operation for the Israeli foreign intelligence service Mossad and, despite the lack of the legal

requirements, procuring asylum for him - despite the fact that the general shared responsibility for the torture of opponents of the Syrian regime in Raqqa. The presumption of innocence applies to those accused who have denied the allegations during the preliminary investigation.

Martin W. is said to have concluded the “cooperation agreement” with the Mossad on May 6, 2015 “for the purpose of gathering information,” as the WKStA explains in its indictment. In July of the same year, the head of the BVT department is said to have told the then BFA director that the Syrian general in France was in danger and handed him an official memo on this with a “threat prognosis”. He knew – at least according to the accusation of the WKStA – that this unexamined assertion “was intended exclusively to substantiate the endangerment indicated to plausible the general’s intended entry into Austria”. As a result, the man was taken to Austria and supported in filing an application for asylum, whereby an application for asylum was made “under false pretenses”.

According to the WKStA, Martin W. is said to have entrusted the then head of the intelligence service proliferation department, which was subordinate to him, with the concrete planning and operational implementation of the whole thing by illegal instruction. According to the indictment, the officer of the Syrian state security service and head of a prison run by this service was received by the BVT at the Austrian border on June 13, 2015, chauffeured to Vienna in a service vehicle and taken to quarters. Just two days later, the General made a – prepared – application for asylum at the Traiskirchen reception center.

