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European Union „EU punishable“

This is how Chaloka Beyani summarizes the assessment of a report by the United Nations at the presentation in Geneva this week. “We are not saying that the EU committed these crimes, but its support is an aid to the commission of these crimes.”

The lawyer from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and other experts had been investigating the situation in Libya since 2016 on behalf of the UN Human Rights Council. The report documents numerous human rights violations in the North African country against migrants. In the detention centers under the control of the Coast Guard, people are sold like slaves and sometimes sexually exploited. Cases of torture, extortion and rape are also listed.



Refugees in Libya/ Photo: EPA

“These facilities received technical, logistical and financial support from the European Union and its Member States, including for the interception

and return of migrants,” the experts write. Those same pushbacks are illegal under international law: “The waters off Libya are not safe,” concluded Beyani. According to the expert group’s recommendation, the EU must review its support for Libya’s coast guard.

The EU must also take action in the fight against Captagon trade

In contrast to the European Union, the US have published a new sanctions package intended to curb Captagon smuggling out of the MENA region.



Pomegranates, filled with Captagon/ Photo: AP

The US Biden government passed a package of sanctions against Syrian and Lebanese backers of the Captagon trade. The US Treasury Department’s list ended up with Khalid Qaddur, a businessman with close ties to Bashar al-Assad’s brother Maher, who heads the 4th Armored Division. This elite unit ensures the production and distribution of the drug. An estimated 80 percent of all Captagon pills

worldwide are produced in Syria, the sales value of the stimulant in circulation is around € 3 billions - a vital source of income for the financially stricken Assad regime. Members of the ruling clan are also identified in the sanctions as key players in drug smuggling at the interface between politics, business and the military, such as Samer Kamal and Wassim Badi Al-Assad, both cousins of the head of state.

The "Captagon Act" is also likely to target the Lebanese backers of the drug trade: With Nuah Al-Zouaiter, the US sanctions hit the link between the 4th Division and Hezbollah in Lebanon. The US measures are intended to stop not only the production but also the sale of the drug.

Germany

Parliamentary hearing on the Democracy Promotion Act

Demokratie- fördergesetz

Experts rate the federal government's draft law "to strengthen measures to promote democracy, shape diversity, prevent extremism and political education" as generally positive.

According to the federal government, the aim of the law is "to protect democracy in Germany as a form of society and the basis of coexistence, to further shape it and to strengthen it for current and future challenges". Shaping and promoting democracy and respecting the rule of law is not just a state task, but a joint concern of the state and a lively, democratic civil society.

In order to strengthen democracy, for political education, to prevent any form of extremism and group-related enmity and to shape social diversity and participation, the federal government

wants to carry out federal measures on the basis of an express statutory mandate and promote measures by third parties, "provided they are of supra-regional importance and are in the substantial federal interest".

Experts also reported criticism and demanded transparency of the selection criteria. The chance of funding should not depend on the "ideology" of a project or its proximity to the government. In this context, the previous practice of funding has been criticized, from which representatives of political Islam have also benefited in individual cases. There is a risk of also financing organizations or projects that pursue a "victim-offender reversal".

New negotiations with traditional Islamic religious communities

At the beginning of June, the Rhineland-Palatinate state government will start new contract negotiations with the four Islamic associations after a break of several years. The focus is on Islamic religious education, the establishment of a chair for Islamic theology at the University of Koblenz, dealing with public holidays, pastoral care and funerals. This was announced by the Ministry of Science after the cabinet decision in Mainz.



Prime Minister Malu Dreyer in a Ditiib-mosque/ Photo: Ditiib

The four associations are the Islamic Religious Community Ditiib Rhineland-Palatinate, the Shura Rhineland-Palatinate State Association of Muslims, the State Association of Islamic Cultural Centers Rhineland-Palatinate and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat. A dialogue process is to accompany the contract negotiations.

The state government had already started talks about contract negotiations with the associations in 2013. Because of the attempted coup in Turkey, the contract negotiations were suspended

in the summer of 2016 by mutual agreement. Reports from 2014 and 2015 on the Islamic associations were supplemented by additional reports "in order to examine the sufficient independence from third-party influences on the state associations," reported the ministry. The state government also decided in 2021 to continue the target agreement with the Islamic religious community Ditib Rhineland-Palatinate - despite the invitation of Turkish historian with anti-Semitic and homophobic statements. "The Ditib regional association has taken responsibility and drawn drastic consequences," said the responsible culture minister at the time, Konrad Wolf (SPD). "It is and remains crucial that the cooperation partners with whom negotiations are conducted are reliable and independent of the state," said the opposition in Parliament. This is particularly important with a view to Islamic religious education. "We remember the problems with Ditib," warns the CDU. "There must not be any interference at our schools - that applies to religious education as well as to all other areas." That is why Rhineland-Palatinate must finally start training Islamic religion teachers itself.

Austria

New anti-Semitism study presented in Parliament

According to a survey, more than a third of people in Austria believe in anti-Jewish myths. Of the 2,000 respondents, 36 percent supported the statement that Jews dominated the international business community, according to the parliament-commissioned representative study that was presented. An equal proportion felt that Jews would try to take advantage of their persecution in the Holocaust.

According to study leader Eva Zeglovits, prejudice against Jews was more pronounced among people with less education, little knowledge of Judaism, and general propensity for conspiracy theories. The pollsters also found an above-average level of agreement with anti-Semitic statements among people of Turkish and Arabic origin. The survey shows that - based on the Austrian population with and without a migration background - massive anti-Semitism was found in 15 percent of the autochthonous population, 36 percent in those with a migration background, latent anti-Semitism in 32 percent to 54 percent (population with a migration background), no anti-Semitism was detected in 54 percent of those surveyed without a migrant background, among those with a migrant background it was 43 percent.



Presentation of the report in the Austrian Parliament/ Photo: IMAGO