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European Union

Italian ex-minister new EU envoy for the Gulf region

Italy's former foreign minister Di Maio is to become EU representative for the Gulf region. According to the will of EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, he is to hold the new post of special representative of the Union for the Gulf region. On April 27, the EU Political and Security Committee endorsed Borrell's personnel proposal without debate. The member states are represented with their own ambassadors. The final decision rested with the council, which upheld the appeal on May 15.

The new EUSR will be tasked with "further developing a stronger, broader and more strategic partnership between the EU and the Gulf region and to support the EU High Representative in implementing the foreign and security aspects of joint communications for the EU." "Strategic

partnership with the Gulf," says the statement by the EU Council.

The new representative for the Gulf region, it said, "will seek the best ways to contribute to the region's stability and security by initiating and supporting long-term regional dialogues and solutions with individual Gulf partners and relevant organizations." stating that the EUSR "will support and work with the Council and the European Commission to ensure the coherence of the EU's external action in the region and to help increase the visibility and understanding of the role of the European Union". Di Maio will take office on June 21.

Although Di Maio is only 36 years old, he can look back on a political career spanning around a decade. In 2013 he was elected to parliament for the first time as a leading representative of the left-wing populist Five Star Movement. At the age of 26 he was elected the youngest Vice-President of the Chamber of Deputies in the history of the Italian Republic. From September 2017 to January 2020, Di Maio was party leader of the Five Stars. Under Di Maio's leadership, the protest movement founded by television comedian Beppe Grillo in 2009 achieved its greatest triumph in the March 2018 parliamentary elections head of government. In the left-wing government of the Conte II cabinet and in the broad coalition under Prime Minister Mario Draghi from February 2021 to October 2022, Di Maio then held the post of foreign minister. In June 2022, Di Maio left the Five Star Movement in a dispute with the new party leader Giuseppe Conte and tried to found



Luigi Di Maio/ Photo: LaPresse

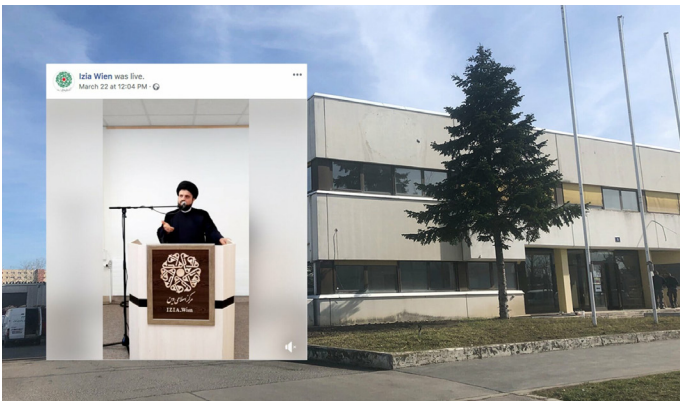
his own party.

The launch of Di Maio for a post in Brussels was undertaken by the still incumbent Prime Minister Draghi after his fall in Rome: as a thank you for Di Maio's loyal diplomatic services. The young Italian with no special language skills, no expertise in the region and no experience in multilateral institutions prevailed in Borrell's preselection against formally stronger competitors. Di Maio's (party) political proximity to Borrell and, above all, the fact that Berlin and Paris helped push through a personnel proposal by Draghi and thus put a political cuckoo's egg in the nest of the unloved new Meloni government spoke in favor of Di Maio: an Italian for a high post in Brussels, which they didn't want, but couldn't prevent either.

Austria

Mullah mosque in Vienna under observation

The so-called Imam Ali Center in Vienna-Floridsdorf (IZIA) has caused controversy since the protests in Iran against the mullah regime and its moral police. The Documentation Center for Political Islam and Ewa Ernst-Dziedzic, Green MP, see the IAZ as a branch office of the Islamic Republic that should be used to influence Iranian exiles in Austria. Dziedzic even went a step further, describing the center as a "hub for espionage and political influence" by the mullahs' regime in Vienna.



IZIA in Wien/ Photo: MeinBezirk.at

Since 2017, the IZIA has been located in Vienna's 21st district in the middle of a commercial zone, on property belonging to the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Iranian Embassy in Vienna has left use of the building to the "Islamic Center Imam Ali". The state of Iran was already the owner of the last Imam Ali headquarters on Mollardgasse in Vienna's 6th district. The 9,500 m² property was

acquired in 2017. According to the original planning application, it was supposed to be a mosque, but according to the Vienna building police, this was rejected on the grounds that "religious and school events are not allowed to take place in the company building area due to the dedication". Nevertheless, the center regularly sends out broadcasts on prayers, ceremonies and commemorative events such as the Ayatollah Khomeini Memorial Day, primarily via its Telegram group: "The Islamic Center Imam Ali in Vienna sends condolences on the anniversary of the death of the innovator of pure Islam, Ayatollah Khomeini, the greatest Islamic scholars of our time, all his faithful companions."

Now, however, a parliamentary response from the liberal Neos MP Stephanie Krisper brings new details about the IAZ back to the table. The Green Ministry of Justice is aware of two Austria-wide proceedings in connection with the center and the associated association - both have already been discontinued.

According to the Ministry of Justice, however, investigations were ultimately abandoned due to the lack of initial suspicion of a criminal offense "after the more than 30-year-old document attributed to Ruhollah Khomeini was published neither in an approving or justifying manner nor with a critical intention".

A second trial only came about last year. Specifically, authorities received an anonymous tip alleging that the Imam Ali Center may be involved in "criminal activities," specifically "the transfer of funds for the purpose of terrorist financing, smuggling and drug trafficking using the hawala system", it says in the response.

Germany

German Foreign Minister in the Gulf region

Foreign Minister Baerbock first traveled to Jeddah in Saudi Arabia. There she discussed bilateral issues and questions of regional crisis diplomacy with her counterpart Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud. Saudi Arabia's regional commitment was most recently demonstrated in Sudan: the kingdom mediated between the conflict parties with the aim of achieving a speedy ceasefire and played a crucial role in the evacuation of thousands of people from Sudan.

The Foreign Minister then met artists in a cultural center. Hearing the voices of civil society in Saudi Arabia is important because they provide a critical driver for local societal change. The human rights situation in Saudi Arabia continues to be very difficult, the ministry is quoted.

In addition, Foreign Minister Baerbock met her Yemeni counterpart Mubarak and the UN Coordinator for Humanitarian Aid in Yemen, David Gressly, in Jeddah. The conflict in Yemen, which has now been going on for more than nine years, has largely destroyed the country's infrastructure. More than two thirds of the population - and thus more than 23 million people - are dependent on humanitarian aid and protection. As one of the largest humanitarian donors, Germany is committed to Yemenis.



Baerbock with Qatari Prime and Foreign Minister Al Thani/ Photo: dpa

Foreign Minister Baerbock then traveled to Qatar, where she met her counterpart Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani. This also dealt with regional issues as well as Germany's bilateral relations with Qatar. Another topic addressed on the agenda was the normalization of relations with Syria that the Arab states are aiming for,

which Germany believes must be linked to clear conditions due to the ongoing repression of the Assad regime.

In addition, on the last day of her trip, Baerbock met with representatives of the International Labor Organization for discussions on the subject of workers' rights. This topic came into focus above all in the light of the soccer World Cup in Qatar.

