

# Europe Monitor

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## Germany

### Protests against new Ditib mosque

The old Ditib central mosque in Wuppertal is wedged between shops and apartment buildings on a major street in the western German city. The short, bright minaret barely rises above the multi-storey outbuilding.

Now the Turkish community is planning to move to the other side of the street and redesign the 6,000 square meter run-down area with a free-standing large mosque, dome and needle-looking minaret. The project includes a meeting center, training rooms, retail, assisted living for the elderly and a kindergarten.

A large city council majority of SPD, CDU, Greens and FDP approved the project, but the discussion about it continues. Concerned citizens started collecting signatures for a citizens' initiative against the building project. If enough people have signed, the council will have to look at it



*The new Ditib mosque/ Photo: Ditib Wuppertal*

again and decide whether to go to a referendum. The old mosque on the Gathe, as the street is called, has been there for almost 40 years. It has long since belonged to urban society. The community, which is organized as an association, has 548 members and is a meeting point for around 10,000 people.

Ditib has long been accompanied by a general suspicion, which is mainly expressed towards the mosque headquarters in Cologne and also affects its local offshoots in the municipalities. It was also pointed out in Wuppertal council proposals that the statutory religious advisory board "always gives the possibility that the Turkish religious authority Diyanet can influence the community". However, one sees "that the theoretically possible influence of the religious advisory board in the practical handling and orientation of the community is not of great importance, but of decreasing importance".

The initiators of the Wuppertal citizens' petition, on the other hand, say: "This Islamic association belongs to the DITIB association, which is dependent on the religious authority of the Turkish state under the current President Erdogan. The extremely authoritarian, repressive and belligerent policy of Turkey is also having an impact in Germany and here in Wuppertal."

One of the initiators of the citizens' initiative in Wuppertal is himself a member of the city council. "We have nothing against Muslims and mosques. But we have something against Ditib, Erdogan's extended arm," he says. The Wuppertal Ditib offshoot does not shy away from "offering a

forum to people who spread ideologies that form the breeding ground for the autocratic development of Turkey and its military obsession”.

### **Turkish associations fight the memorial for the genocide of Armenians in Cologne**

A 1.5 meter tall steel stele has been standing in a small square at the Hohenzollern Bridge in Cologne for a few weeks. The memorial commemorates the genocide of up to 1.5 million Armenians committed by the Ottoman Empire between 1915 and 1916.

There have been arguments about the memorial for years. It was not established by the city, but had to be enforced against them. In April it was rebuilt for the commemoration of the Armenian Community of Cologne on the occasion of the Genocide Remembrance Day. There was a temporary special permit for this. The district council had previously passed a resolution according to which the memorial should be in a “prominent place” in the future. A search committee should determine the exact location. Until then, the memorial should be allowed to be erected in a “safe place” for a year with a special permit. However, the city council would have to make a final decision. In the meantime, the Cologne politicians have rejected the application to extend the special permit. The memorial must now be removed.



*The memorial/ Photo: Initiative Völkermord Erinnern*

Now it has become clear that Turkish associations are leading the lobbying work against the memorial. More than 50 Cologne organizations have joined forces in an initiative forum of Turkish clubs and associations in and around Cologne (KIT) founded in 2016. Their website states that behind the memorial is a “group within the Cologne Armenian community” that has the desire “to make a career in Germany through hostility

towards the Turks”. The “pseudo-genocide memorial” wants to sow “hatred between societies” by commemorating the “so-called Armenian genocide”.

KIT members include the Ditib religious association, which is under Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and the Union of International Democrats (UID), which is still listed on the website under its old name UETD. In its current report, the German Office for the Protection of the Constitution describes the UID as the “preliminary and lobbying organization of the Turkish governing party AKP and thus the most important organization influencing Turkish diaspora politics in North Rhine-Westphalia”. It was this UID that demonstrated at the beginning of May in front of Cologne Cathedral against what they saw as a “one-sided and incriminating memorial to the so-called Armenian genocide”.

### **European Union**

#### **Qatargate I: Former EP Vice President free to move**

One of the main figures in the European Parliament scandal known as “Qatargate”, Eva Kaili, is allowed to leave Belgium for the first time. The former Vice-President of the European Parliament, who was in custody for four months on suspicion of corruption, was allowed to attend the plenary session in Strasbourg as an independent MEP.

Since her release, three interviews with her have been published, by the French newspaper Liberation, the Italian Corriere della Sera and in video format by Spain’s El Mundo. At the end of May, the investigating judge responsible for the case, Michel Claise, lifted the house arrest that Kaili had been in for two months after her release from custody; since then she no longer has to wear an electronic ankle bracelet. But one of the conditions is that she does not comment on her case to the media, after all the investigations are ongoing.

Kaili now presents herself as a victim of a major conspiracy. “From the court file, my lawyers learned that the Belgian secret services had monitored the activities of the members of the Pegasus special committee,” she told the Italian newspaper. This is a committee of inquiry of the European Parliament that was set up in March 2022 to investigate the use of the Pegasus spy



software. "The fact that elected MPs are being spied on by the secret services should raise greater concerns for the health of our European democracy," Kaili said. That was "the real scandal".



*Eva Kaili in Strasbourg/ Photo: AFP*

In the interviews, Kaili was unable to plausibly refute the suspicions against her. The public prosecutor's office continues to investigate them and other suspects on suspicion of money laundering, corruption and membership in a criminal organization. None of the accused are in custody anymore, and house arrest has also been lifted for Francesco G. and MEP Marc Tarabella. Only Panzeri himself still wears an electronic ankle bracelet. MEP Andrea Cozzolino continues to oppose his transfer to Belgium in Italy. All of the accused insist on their innocence, with the exception of Panzeris.

Attorney General Van Leeuw warned against wrong conclusions. "The end of a detention has nothing to do with the examination of the matter," he told *Le Soir*. Detention can only be imposed if there is a risk of escaping, collusion or committing a crime, i.e. under narrow conditions, all of which are subject to judicial control. A total of 15 investigators are working on the case. It was a "complex dossier," said Van Leeuw, indicating that cooperation with Qatari authorities, for example, was difficult. He expressed hope that the investigation could be completed by the end of the year.

## **Qatargate II: New learnings**

The European Parliament was ill-prepared when the corruption scandal involving bribery from Qatar and Morocco became known. Internal controls and rules were lax. Those who resigned from parliament could continue working as lobbyists seamlessly and did not even have to register if they worked for an NGO. "No steps have yet been taken to address the culture of impunity that has developed over many years," says Transparency International in a new report.

One step that has been missing so far concerns an independent ethics body that could prescribe common codes of conduct for all EU institutions. The EU Commission has now presented its long-awaited proposal. It sets a tight and ambitious schedule. "We want the ethics committee to be set up as soon as possible so that it can set the standards before the European elections," said Vice-President Vera Jourova, who is responsible for the issue. Citizens should know in advance what rules will apply to those who ask for their trust.

A new body to be set up should have six months to agree on minimum standards in eight areas. They would then apply to all political representatives of the institutions - a group of around 1,500 people in total, including 705 MEPs. There have long been uniform rules for officials.

The eight areas to be regulated are: the declaration of interests and assets that public officials are required to give up, outside employment, the acceptance of gifts, the acceptance of awards, post-term activities, the transparency of meetings with stakeholders, and standards for oversight of public officials rules and sanctions for violations. There are currently significant differences between the institutions in all fields.

It is unclear what the ethics committee will agree on. In any case, it should be a minimum standard that every institution can go beyond. A blockade is to be prevented by the deadlines in the proposal. The Commission is already threatening internally that, if the worst comes to the worst, it would go to the European Court of Justice if the deadlines are not met. However, a quick agreement is unlikely because there is a lot at stake for Parliament and an independent ethics committee there remains controversial.