

# Europe Monitor

No. 9 in 2023



## Germany

### Asylum reform for the EU

The German government has set itself the task of “shaping migration in a forward-looking and realistic manner with an active and orderly policy”. In doing so, it is coming under increasing pressure: On the one hand, the federal states are demanding more support and effective limitation of immigration. On the other hand, a number of EU partners want to tighten the European rules, some of them drastically.

In this situation, the federal government seeks its salvation by campaigning for approval with a common position in Europe. Berlin is prepared to take a more restrictive course, also to prevent minimum standards for the protection of refugees being dragged in the EU.

An agreement among the EU states would have to be in place by the summer in order to get the proposals through the legislative process be-

fore the European elections in spring 2024. For the federal states with their heavily occupied accommodations, especially in big cities like Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne and Leipzig, it should be too late - and at best bring gradual relief: The largest group they have to deal with are the approximately one million war refugees from the Ukraine.

The German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser hopes that the reform of EU law, for which majorities in the EU are not yet certain, will result in an early registration of asylum seekers and migrants. It is “extremely important” to register and identify “at the earliest possible time”. So far, according to the Dublin rules of the EU, those states have to examine asylum applications whose national territory migrants enter first. This usually affects countries on the EU’s external borders, such as Italy or Greece.

If migrants are apprehended in other EU states, a database in which the fingerprints are recorded can be used to determine which state is responsible - asylum seekers can be sent back there. Theoretically, only a few people would arrive in Germany in this way. But the system hasn’t worked for years, also because border states let people move on without registering. The shortcomings of the previous system are reflected in the numbers of so-called transfers to other EU countries. In almost 69,000 cases last year, German authorities asked other EU countries to take people back. The federal states agreed in a good 36,000 cases, but rejected 27,000. According to the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees,



Nancy Faeser in Brussels/ Photo: ZDF

only 4,200 people were actually deported to other EU countries.

The federal government hopes to be able to break through the previous blockade on the reform of the EU rules under the EU Council Presidency of Sweden or subsequently Spain. Faeser is pushing the plans in a group of six along with France, Italy, Belgium, Sweden and Spain. An agreement is difficult but possible, according to government circles.

From the Federal Government's point of view, a prerequisite for the reform would be that the asylum seekers would be adequately cared for and accommodated during the border procedure and would enjoy legal protection in accordance with EU standards. The countries on the EU's external borders would receive money from a binding solidarity mechanism within the EU and support from the responsible EU agencies, above all the border protection agency Frontex.

### **Fearing new Islamist extremism**

The head of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution of North Rhine-Westphalia, Jürgen Kayser, warns of further terrorist attacks by the "Islamic State" (IS) in Germany. Even after the collapse of his caliphate, there are regional IS offshoots that "still coordinate attacks in the West. In particular, the terrorist group 'Province Khorasan' should be mentioned, which has a very strong



**Bundesamt für  
Verfassungsschutz**

foundation in Afghanistan and is active as far as Europe." Dangers arise from the spread of Islamist ideology via the Internet, for example short spots on Tiktok. "We are also increasingly observing proselytizing activities by extremist Salafists who are trying to spread their Islamist ideas." There is also an increasing interaction between extremist ideology and psychological instability. For some time now, the security authorities

have been observing a renewed strengthening of the Islamist scene. Only two months ago, the Hessian Office for the Protection of the Constitution, Bernd Neumann, warned that Islamism is currently the greatest danger after right-wing extremism. "What we've experienced over the past two or three years has been something of a deceptive calm."

Since the end of last year, the Office for the Protection of the Constitution has noticed "increased agitation, particularly with regard to proselytizing activities by Islamists". At first glance, the behavior of local Islamists appears to be non-violent. "But this proselytizing can ultimately prepare the breeding ground for violent jihadists." Islamists tried to win followers through the virtual world. "These are sometimes very well made, also multilingual appearances on various internet channels, which are intended to appeal to younger people in particular. What worries us about this is that the extremists seem to be consistently successful in recruiting. We are finding, especially among younger Islamists, that radicalization has actually taken place via the Internet," Neumann continued.

### **Terrorist donations**

The federal prosecutor's office has arrested seven alleged supporters of the terrorist organization "Islamic State" (IS) in a nationwide procedure. More than 19 properties belonging to the main suspects were searched – the investigators searched more than 90 other properties in Berlin, Bavaria, Bremen, Baden-Württemberg, Hamburg, Hesse, Rhineland-Palatinate, Thuringia, Lower Saxony and North Rhine-Westphalia. It was about a financing network of the IS. "The threat from Islamist terrorism remains high," said German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser. "We are very vigilant and will continue our tough stance against Islamists."

According to the information, four of the arrests were made in North Rhine-Westphalia, one more each in Baden-Württemberg, Rhineland-Palatinate and Bremen. The three men and four women are accused of supporting a terrorist organization. The accused should be presented to the investigating judge of the Federal Court of Justice in a timely manner.

The authorities confirmed that the proceedings are about an international donation network that



is said to have collected at least 65,000 euros for the terrorist organization. The funds collected were then transferred to IS members in Syria and to intermediaries named there. The donations were used in particular to improve the supply situation for members of the association imprisoned in the northern Syrian camps Al-Hol and Roj. In some cases, the money was used to enable the inmates to escape or be smuggled out of the camps.

As the public prosecutor added, the homes of a total of 14 suspects were searched. The properties were located in Frankfurt, Offenbach, Wiesbaden, Darmstadt and Kassel, among others. The accused are between 20 and 44 years old with Algerian, Italian, Turkish, Austrian, Iraqi, Moroccan and German nationality. A 34-year-old man from Darmstadt is accused of having acted as a middleman within the donation network. "The accused is said to have received donations and, with the involvement of another person, forwarded them to a suspected IS member in Syria," the authority said. For this purpose, the accused is said to have set up an account with an online payment service in September 2020 and made it available for the network to call for donations. The other accused are suspected of having repeatedly transferred amounts of money to people from the intermediate level of the donation network in the years 2020 to 2022, although they were aware that the money would be passed on to IS. A total of around 16,000 euros is said to have flowed to the IS. According to reports, the accused have long been well-known actors in the Islamist scene.

## European Union

### First Qatargate lessons

In June, EU Commissioner Věra Jourová wants to present a law that would oblige lobbyists, NGOs and the media to disclose any funding from third countries. This should show whether and to what extent authoritarian regimes influence the European public.

The EU Commission wants to oblige lobby representatives, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the media and research institutions to disclose in a national transparency register whether and to what extent they are funded by governments from third countries. The authority

intends to present a corresponding legislative proposal in June.

"We will propose a concrete legislative initiative to protect our democracies as part of a package of measures called 'Defending Democracy'," said the EU Deputy Commissioner. According to this, "money flows from third countries whose aim is to influence public opinion and the democratic environment should be disclosed".



The aim of the initiative is to make transparent whether authoritarian regimes such as Russia, China or Arab countries are trying to influence public opinion or political decisions in the EU countries in their favor through paid straw men. EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen had already announced in her annual speech on the situation in Europe in September 2022 that the Commission wanted to protect European democracies from covert foreign influence. She said at the time that "any Trojan horses of autocracies cannot be allowed to attack our democracies from within."

In a resolution more than a year ago, the EU Parliament pointed out the danger of foreign governments manipulating public opinion in the EU countries. Among other things, MEPs noted at the time "that a number of politicians, including former high-ranking European politicians and officials, have been hired by foreign, authoritarian, state-controlled national or private companies in exchange for their knowledge and at the expense of the interests of the citizens of the EU and their Member States to be hired or co-opted".

A lobbying study by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) concluded in 2021 that only Canada, Australia and the USA have regulations on foreign influence.

## Türkiye

### Erdogan's inauguration with German celebrity

Former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder flew to Turkey to see Recep Tayyip Erdogan. He and his wife attended the inauguration ceremony for the Turkish president. Schröder once praised Erdogan's "impressive leadership".



*The Schröder couple in Ankara/ Photo: Imago*

Former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (SPD) traveled to Ankara on Saturday to celebrate the inauguration of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

This is shown by official pictures and a post by his wife on Instagram.

Ex-Chancellor Schröder traveled to Turkey with his wife Soyeon Schröder-Kim. The Schröder wife sent via Instagram "Greetings from Ankara!". She further commented on a picture of the two in Ankara in the Presidential Palace with the words: "The first time my birthday party in Türkiye and then also for this special occasion!"

Schröder has a long-standing private friendship with Erdogan. In 2005, Schröder praised Erdogan's "impressive leadership".