

Austria Briefing: September 2022

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Operation Luxor

Lack of permanent translator hinders Operation Luxor investigations two years on, further underscores failures of Austrian agencies

- Two years following the Operation Luxor raids, investigations are faltering because of [the lack of Arabic interpreters](#); the responsible Styrian state police still do not have a permanent translator.
- At the state police headquarters in Styria, for example, [not a single interpreter is permanently employed](#). The relevant staff available to the Styria and Vienna offices for the protection of the constitution can only be used on an hourly basis and cannot be utilised every day due to other activities.
- This has major consequences as, in the course of Operation Luxor, investigators secured an immense amount of data - corresponding to a stack of A4 paper 5,000 kilometres long - of which 95 percent is written in Arabic.
- Due to this lack of key resources many cases have been unnecessarily prolonged. Additionally, this news attests to Operation Luxor survivors' testimonies of the sloppy interpretation of data and incorrect translations being presented to them as evidence during the interrogation.
- The failure of Operation Luxor has become undeniably apparent. Now this news reveals poor investigative work - which only now, 2 years on from the Operation Luxor raids, and after inflicting an immense amount of trauma and brutality to the survivors, is being addressed.

National Security & Counter-terrorism

Trial set to begin over alleged collusion in watershed 2020 Vienna attack

- On November 2nd, 2020 a gunman opened fire in Austria's capital Vienna, resulting in four deaths, and 23 people injured.
The gunman Kujtim Fejzulai was shot dead by police at the scene of the crime.

- This incident was used by the Austrian government of Sebastian Kurz to legitimise a subsequent major crackdown on Austrian Muslims, including through the Operation Luxor raids a week later.
- [A total of six men between the ages of 22 and 32 have been charged](#) for allegedly assisting the gunman in preparation for the attack, with the trial against them set to commence on October 18th.

According to the Vienna public prosecutor's office, these men were not directly involved in the attack, but are accused of having actively helped Fejzulai.

- Two of the accused are alleged to have visited the killer in his apartment shortly before the attack, and another is said to have been responsible for planning and also taught him how to use the rapid-fire weapon. A further man is alleged to have identified the target with Fejzulai, and the sixth is said to have been a co-organiser.
- The [main charges](#) are as follows: involvement in terrorist offenses in connection with murder, terrorist organisation and criminal organisation. The main hearing will extend over several months. For the time being, 17 days of trial are planned, and there will be no judgments before February 2023.
- Despite the repressive and unlawful Operation Luxor raids having been framed by the then-Interior Minister, and now Chancellor, Karl Nehammer as a necessary [response to the 2nd November attack](#), these trials and charges are proof that the survivors of Operation Luxor have no connection to the 2nd November attack.

German expert group on “Political Islamism” is dissolved

- The *Expert Group on Political Islamism* of Germany set up by former Interior Minister Horst Seehofer (Christian Social Union - CSU) [was dissolved](#) by current Interior Minister Nancy Faeser (Social Democratic Party of Germany - SPD). The group, which only started work last year, has stopped working again.
- Interior Minister Faeser argued that combatting [“rightwing extremism”](#) is a more pressing issue. However there are reasons to believe that the dissolution of the *Expert Group* might be a [political](#) decision, or because some of its members are said to have [ties to third party countries](#), including the UAE.
- A [spokeswoman for the Federal Ministry of the Interior](#) told the German press agency *dpa* that the Group’s ‘scientific perspective was sufficiently limited’, and therefore that it is appropriate to continue the exchange of experts in a different form, with specific details to be worked out.



According to her "It is planned to hold a regular symposium in which the [Expert Group] network will be a crucial part."

- Germany's *Expert Group* is said to have been established on the example of the Austrian *Documentation Center on Political Islam*. In fact some of the experts on the German group are [affiliated with](#) the Austrian *Documentation Center*, which provided the 'intellectual cover' for the repressive Operation Luxor raids and other discriminatory policies enacted against Muslims in Austria.
- The *Expert Group on Political Islamism* makes clear that the Islamophobic network of "intellectuals" and "academics" which operates to prepare the intellectual grounds for Islamophobic policies in Austria is also working to implement similar approaches in Germany.

Members of the Furkan Mosque charged with terrorism-related offences, largely stemming from Facebook posts

- [The trial surrounding the Furkan Mosque in Graz](#) has commenced in the Vienna Regional Court. In total 14 people are being charged, for allegedly recruiting and training young people for a terrorist organisation.
- The trial is taking place in Vienna because [Facebook postings were decisive in the indictment](#). This is a media content offence and the Supreme Court has therefore decided that it is being tried at the Vienna Regional Court and not in Graz.
- It is worth noting that in Britain, there has been recent concern [even from within the ranks](#) of the security apparatus about the over-use of 'online terrorism' prosecutions, and the fact that very young people are being prosecuted for online offences.

And yet, the Online Safety Bill currently going through Parliament in Britain would enable a greater crackdown on content online - including under the rubric of countering terrorism.

17 year-old citizen of Turkish descent detained for terrorism-related offences, released

- A 17 year-old Austrian citizen of Turkish descent was [arrested by LVT \(the State Offices for the Protection of the Constitution and Combating Terrorism\)](#) at Vienna Airport after returning from Turkey. A search was then carried out on the suspect's home.

- The 17-year old [was accused of](#) disseminating “terrorist” propaganda, condoning crimes committed by a terrorist organisation, and of “radicalising” a young female. The young woman was questioned immediately after the 17-year-old was arrested and her house was also searched; she was reported as being at large.
- The 17-year old [was released from custody](#) on September 14, 2022 by decision of the *OLG Graz*, subject to several conditions.

National Developments

Ex-Chancellor Sebastian Kurz sabotages questioning in corruption investigation committee

- Ex-Chancellor Sebastian Kurz (of the ruling *ÖVP* - Austrian People’s Party) is the central figure of several corruption scandals of the *ÖVP*.

These scandals relate to the filling of governmental posts, manipulation of surveys and advertisements, and tax breaks for the super-rich - all under his chancellorship.

- But Kurz did not want to contribute to the investigation. With the use of rhetorical tricks, obstructionary manoeuvres and apparent gaps in memory, he [sabotaged the questioning in the *ÖVP* corruption investigation committee](#).
- The *ÖVP* assisted Kurz as much as possible, blocking questions and delaying the survey with more than 20 requests to speak on the rules of procedure.
- As a [result of the delaying tactics](#), Kurz was not questioned by the far-right *FPÖ* (Freedom Party of Austria) and the Green Party due to time. Therefore, all parties - except the *ÖVP* - are seeking to re-invite Kurz for questioning.
- Although Austria initiated many Islamophobic policies and measures under the regime of Ex-Chancellor Kurz, including the Operation Luxor raids - now deemed unlawful - Kurz was not questioned about his maltreatment of the Austrian Muslim minority during the investigation.