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Counter-terrorism & National Security

Repressive Operation Luxor case to be extended 2 more years despite failure to produce results

- Despite the scale of the operation – 21,000 hours of surveillance, half a million euros spent on phone tapping, and 900 heavily armed police officers – the repressive Operation Luxor raids have yielded nothing but disappointment for the Austria state over the course of almost three years.
- The list of suspects includes around 100 names, individuals, groups, and businesses.

Yet, the Graz prosecutor's office seems lightyears away from pressing any charges.

None of the alleged "terrorists" have seen the inside of a jail cell, and recent months have seen a series of cases linked to Operation Luxor being dropped due to a lack of evidence, in an embarrassment to the Austrian state.

- Yet the [prosecution has been audacious enough to request a two-year extension](#), citing the inconvenience of dealing with a massive data haul of around 200 terabytes, primarily in Arabic, requiring overburdened interpreters.

A former prosecutor nonchalantly notes that suspicion alone justifies prolonging the investigation, while the authorities drowning in data are apparently irrelevant to the court's assessment.

- Nearly 50 suspects are slated for an extended circus, and around 60 are still caught in the proceedings.
- The Graz prosecutor's office remains tight-lipped, and the decision on the extension hangs. A promised parliamentary inquiry seeks answers to

why a press conference involving top officials was out of sync with the prosecutor's office.

Exploiting Online Evidence: A convenient pretext for heightened surveillance

- The recent [case involving two teenagers planning a school attack](#) in Bruck an der Mur has taken a disturbing turn, raising concerns about the potential misuse of online evidence to advocate for increased surveillance powers.

The aftermath of the incident seems to be paving the way for a broader push for surveillance measures.

- The Leoben Regional Court sentenced two teenagers, aged 15 and 16, for planning an attack on the New Middle School, based on evidence collected solely from online platforms and group chats.

The case came to light after Dutch intelligence services alerted authorities to the teenagers' online posts, leading to their apprehension. According to authorities, their plans were thwarted by the lack of access to the firearm.

- The conviction of the two teenagers has quickly become a rallying point for proponents of enhanced surveillance - the Directorate for State Security and Intelligence Service (DSN) agency and Interior Minister Karner - who argue that such incidents underscore the need for greater monitoring of online activities.

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- However, this narrative conveniently overlooks the broader context and implications. The focus on online evidence, which can be difficult to link definitively to a concrete threat, raises questions about the slippery slope towards treating certain online expressions as potential crimes, a consequence more likely to be faced by people of already securitised identities.
- As is evident by the media campaign on this and similar cases, this case is being used as another scapegoat to justify expanding surveillance powers, potentially infringing on individuals' privacy and civil liberties.

Control Commission for the State Security Agency established in the National Council

- A [Control Commission for the State Security Agency has been established](#) in Austria's National Council after more than a year of discussions.

The National Council approved a proposal, backed by a two-thirds majority, to create this commission. The only opposing vote came from the FPÖ, which claimed that their suggested candidate was overlooked due to perceived party affiliations.

- The proposed control commission, a purportedly impartial entity housed within the Interior Ministry, will serve as a watchdog over the DSN's activities.

The underlying narrative suggests that this commission will act as a reassuring presence in the wake of unsettling revelations of egregious corruption within the former Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution and

Counter-Terrorism (BVT) agency which were laid bare by their failures around the November 2020 attack in Vienna.

- It comes as part of a bid to salvage the reputation of the newly christened (DSN) - an agency allegedly designed to replace its disgraced predecessor, the BVT - as a supposedly collaborative initiative involving Austria's major political factions.

Ostensibly marking a reform of the State Security and Intelligence Service Act, this initiative conveniently aims to offer an aura of transparency.

- The government faced challenges during the process of forming the Control Commission for the State Security Agency. Originally intended to consist of three members, consensus couldn't be reached between the coalition parties and the opposition. As a solution, the commission was expanded to five members.
- Yet a sense of scepticism hangs over the proposal, given their moves to thwart opposition party SPÖ's plea for a mandatory reevaluation of trustworthiness every three years.

This peculiar manoeuvre casts a shadow over the claims of transparency and accountability, leaving observers to ponder whether this control commission will be anything more than a façade to placate the public.

Raab Accuses FPÖ of prioritising "Terrorist Speech" over security

- Austria's recent push to combat "terrorist content" online through the introduction of the "Terrorism Content Act" raises concerning implications. Spearheaded by Media Minister Susanne Raab of the ruling ÖVP, the law aims to tackle the

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dissemination of so-called “extremist” material on the internet.

However, beneath the surface of this move lies a host of critical questions about the potential erosion of digital liberties and the blurred line between “security” measures and censorship.

- Susanne Raab, the ÖVP's Media Minister, launched a sharp critique against the FPÖ lambasting their unanimous rejection of the Counter-Terrorism Content Law.

[Raab directly targeted FPÖ leader Herbert Kickl, alleging that his stance amounted to advocating "freedom of speech for terrorists."](#)

- The law's reliance on the EU directive targeting online terrorist content is a reminder of the broader trend among governments to exert greater control over digital spaces.

Allowing the general public to report potentially "terrorist" content to KommAustria might create a landscape ripe for abuse and arbitrary reporting, as every submission, regardless of its legitimacy, is funnelled to law enforcement for assessment.

- The rushed timeframe imposed on internet platforms to remove flagged content within a mere hour upon official orders is worrisome, and the law's potential to encroach on freedom of expression cannot be ignored.

Moreover, the absence of a clear and well-defined criterion for what constitutes "terrorist content" raises red flags about potential misuse and the chilling effect on open dialogue.

- The Counter-Terrorism Content Law is slated to take effect on September 1st.