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1. Korruption in den Reihen von Yisrael Beitenu

Gerade zehn Wochen vor den Wahlen verhaftete die Polizei zahlreiche Politiker und Funktionäre unter dem Verdacht der Korruption. Im Zentrum der Untersuchung steht Faina Kirshenbaum, stellvertretende Innenministerin und die Frau an Außenminister Avigdor Libermans Seite in der rechtskonservativen Partei Yisrael Beitenu. Generaldirektoren aus Ministerien und öffentlichen Behörden, Knesset-Abgeordnete, Gewerkschaftsfunktionäre sowie mehrere Vorsitzende von Ortverwaltungen und Parteilobbyisten befinden sich seit dem 24. Dezember in Untersuchungshaft oder Hausarrest. Liberman kritisierte die Polizei dafür, dass sie mit der Affäre so zeitnah zu den Wahlen an die Öffentlichkeit ging.

Corruption and elections

(...) Liberman is rightly bitter and skeptical about police's motives. For the better part of 17 years he has been the focus of corruption investigations. The most recent indictment against Liberman was filed in December 2012, just six weeks before the last elections. Nothing came of any of these police investigations. (...) Some legal experts claim it is unfair to

conduct high-profile investigations of politicians during election season. Ahead of the January 2003 elections, when police and the state prosecutor were investigating prime minister Ariel Sharon's relations with South African businessman Cyril Kern, then-attorney-general Elyakim Rubinstein ordered that findings be kept secret until after elections were over so as not to influence results. Only a leak from inside the State Prosecutor's Office made the investigation public knowledge.(...) Similarly, while we are still at a relatively early stage in this purported corruption case, it seems police and the state prosecutor have enough evidence to justify going public. Also, the corruption allegations involve a large number of people, many of whom are connected with Yisrael Beytenu. The Israeli public has a right to know about all this, while keeping in mind that at this stage these are all suspicions, not indictments.(...) Editorial, JPO, 28.12.14

Corruption, again

"The difference between Russia and Israel," former prisoner of Zion Natan Sharansky once said, "is simple: In Russia, first you sit in jail, and later, when you get to Israel, you become a government minister. Here in Israel, it's the opposite..." (...) If it wasn't so sad, we'd laugh. Because this isn't just another

"wave of arrests," as was first reported, but a tsunami of corruption that threatens to wash us all away in boiling lava of bribery and fraud and breach of trust. The number of cases and extent of the corruption is making even the whitewashed laundered money blush deep red. (...) Even if only some of the theories presented by police investigators and state prosecutors are accurate, there were more than a few people in Israel who in recent years spent many days skipping over the hills of bribery and dancing on the hilltops of breach of justice. (...) Before our very eyes, uninhibited public officials and public servants couldn't take two steps without dipping their hands in the public coffers and doing what they liked with the money. (...) It can be hoped that what appears to be the huge mud swamp exposed last week will turn out to be a small puddle, even if that would still be enough to issue a call to clean house and use every possible method to reduce, if not entirely eradicate, the abhorrent phenomena that threaten to hurt the strength of the state of Israel and leave it stained with the mark of Cain.

Dr. Aviad Hacohen, IHY, 28.12.14

Why are Israeli politicians silent on corruption?

(...) When the Netanyahu-Lapid-Bennett government was formed, Finance Minister Yair Lapid was quick to announce there would be no coalition money, that the corrupt practice of giving parties money to spend as they please was over. Even Economy Minister Naftali Bennett said something about the young blood that was coming in and clearing out the dirty traditions of their predecessors. But the coalition money continued to flow as always. But now Yair "if only they hadn't stopped us in the middle" Lapid isn't explaining how it happened to him. And Bennet? Bennet isn't apologizing for his zigzagging. (...) The cowardly silence of our politicians perhaps explains why an honest man like Agriculture Minister Yair Shamir would join Lieberman, and why Shamir would allow Lieberman to appoint all of the officials in his own ministry, and turn a blind eye to the practices of his party. Maybe during this election season one of our cowardly politicians will at least promise that there will be no coalition funds during the next government?

Raviv Drucker, HAA, 28.12.14

A business first, a party second

(...) The two words "Yisrael Beytenu" now have an entirely different meaning. No longer do they represent a party or a Knesset faction. Nor do they represent the great wave of immigrants who arrived here

after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This pair of words no longer represent the leadership's attempt to integrate into Israeli society. Yisrael Beytenu will from now on be synonymous with a money-laundering scheme that helped create a de facto employment agency for party loyalists. Its party apparatus will forever be regarded as a stock exchange for unnamed tycoons. It is now anything but a party. (...) The alleged crimes in this latest affair were committed under the watch of Attorney-General Yehuda Weinstein. He was apparently too busy closing the investigation against Yisrael Beytenu leader Avigdor Lieberman and his alleged shell companies. (...) Something is rotten in Yisrael Beytenu. This sounds like the crimes Shas Chairman Aryeh Deri committed as interior minister some 24 years ago. Yes, everyone is innocent until proved guilty. (...) One must withhold judgement against this or that individual until justice prevails but Yisrael Beytenu, a party turned business enterprise, has been unmasked.

Dan Margalit, IHY, 26.12.14

2. Abstimmungen in Straßburg und New York über Palästina

Das EU-Parlament entschied Mitte Dezember mit klarer Mehrheit für die Anerkennung Palästinas als Staat. Rund 1000 israelische Intellektuelle, Künstler sowie Vertreter aus der Politik und des Militärs appellierten im Vorfeld an die EU-Abgeordneten, für Palästina zu stimmen. Das Votum unterstützt im Prinzip die Anerkennung der Eigenstaatlichkeit Palästinas und die Zwei-Staaten-Lösung. Parallel zu der Abstimmung in Straßburg reichte die palästinensische Führung mit Vermittlung Jordaniens eine Resolution beim UN-Sicherheitsrat ein, die der Besatzung eine maximale Frist bis 2017 setzen sollte. Das dafür nötige Ergebnis von mindestens neun befürwortenden Stimmen wurde um eine Stimme verpasst.

Think About It: A political tsunami

In recent weeks those objecting to a political settlement with the Palestinians based on the two-state solution have started to describe a sequence of European moves and resolutions designed to enhance the establishment of a Palestinian state, and which allegedly legitimize the Hamas, as a "political tsunami." (...) whether or not one views this as a tsunami, it is the result of the total lack of progress in negotiations with the Palestinians, for which Israel is

partially to blame (...), and Israel's enhanced settlement activities in Judea and Samaria, for which Netanyahu himself is responsible (...). Netanyahu's reaction to the decision (...) has demonstrated a serious defect in his understanding of European history. (...) No one denies that the Jews have faced an existential problem, and that Israel too is not free of such worries. (...) The Europeans, insofar as one can speak of them collectively, have learned from the Holocaust, and the whole Second World War experience for that matter, that fanatic, racist and chauvinistic regimes, which do not respect the national, territorial and human rights of other peoples, pose a threat not only to world peace, but are capable of committing the most atrocious and heinous crimes, in the name of their alleged superiority. (...) However, the Europeans at large certainly perceive the present-day six million Jewish Israelis as being in a completely different situation than the helpless six million Jews mercilessly slaughtered in the Holocaust. Israel today is perceived as anything but helpless. (...) I dare say that with all due respect for the Holocaust – and no one denies that it is an experience which no Jew can ignore, or belittle – constantly mentioning it in arguments, as bitter as they may be, is both contemptuous of the Holocaust, and adds neither honor nor credibility to the Israeli case. (...)

Susan Hattis Rolef, JPO, 28.12.14

Why I called on Europe to recognize Palestine

There are a few weighty reasons for the initiative of some 1,000 activists in the Israeli peace camp – including artists, academics, military officers and former senior government officials – which aims to encourage European parliaments to adopt a general resolution recognizing the state of Palestine (...) The first reason stems from the desire to signal to the moderate Palestinian camp not to give up on the peace process and not to turn to the road of violence. (...) The second reason stems from the growing fear (...) that we are constantly slipping towards a bi-national state (...). New voices of despair are being heard in Israel, both in the right-wing and left-wing circles (...) declaring that there will never be peace between Israel and the Arab world. Giving up on the option of reconciliation and coexistence with the Palestinians casts a heavy shadow on the Israeli state's existence. Therefore we must rise up with all our might against this new sentence, which is destroying the hope for peace. (...) The encouragement we Israelis are giving the European parliaments to officially recognize the state of Palestine

alongside Israel is a moral and existential act not only for the Palestinians, but first and foremost for the Israelis themselves.

A.B. Yehoshua, JED, 20.12.14

The Israelis who back UN hypocrisy

(...) One can, of course, complain about the hypocrisy of the world, and particularly that of European nations, who have continued to ignore the growth of Islamic radicalism and terrorism in the world and have focused instead, in a biased manner, on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Alongside this, more and more nations are symbolically recognizing a Palestinian state and turning a blind eye to all Palestinian misdeeds. (...) But the more one delves into the U.N.'s outrageous conduct, the harder it becomes to separate the actions of the international community from the tailwind provided by certain Israelis. (...) There is no mention of Hamas or its desire to expel us from the region. There is also no mention of the use of reconstruction funds by Hamas to re-arm itself ahead of the next round of fighting or the fact that the Palestinian Authority was kicked out of Gaza by the Palestinians themselves. No, they say, everything is the Israeli government's fault for not initiating a diplomatic process. (...) these are Israeli politicians who, whether they are just trying to butt heads with the government or if they truly believe in the righteousness of Abbas, are ultimately providing fuel for unilateral anti-Israel moves at the U.N. And when they do this, they are helping the lowlifes at the U.N. Dr. Limor Samimian-Darash, IHY, 29.12.14

Yes, I call on the world to intervene

(...) I side with the more than 1,000 patriotic Israelis who signed a petition calling on the parliaments in Europe to recognize Palestine and save Israel from the occupation's wickedness. If only a million Israelis would place their signatures alongside those of A.B. Yehoshua, Amos Oz, and David Grossman. If only the Europeans, Americans and the rest of the world would listen and feel the outcry of these good people. (...) At Israel's request, the donor nations, led by Europe, have financed the occupation for the past 20 years. Until 1994, the Israeli taxpayer bore the responsibility for paying the salaries of the teachers, police and doctors in the occupied territories. Since the Palestinian Authority replaced the military government, the donor nations have transferred over 100 billion shekels to the PA. Yes, 100,000,000,000, there are no extra zeroes here. (...) there is no similar situation in which a democratic country controls by force millions of people, de-

prives them of the freedom of movement, expropriates their land and steals their meager natural resources. The two separate systems of law that exist in the territories are anti-democratic in its worst fashion. (...) If there is a lesson the enlightened world learned from the horrors of the 20th century, it is that human rights are a universal value, and they must not be handed over to a society that is killing itself and its nearby surroundings. Use of all the legal means available to prevent this conspiracy is a democratic requirement, no less important than the principle of the rule of the majority that the right bandies about. (...)

Akiva Eldar, HAA, 27.12.14

Don't be afraid of international institutions

A new norm has come to Israel: The United Nations, the International Court, human rights commissions are all perceived today as threats against our well-being and existence. They are institutions to be boycotted and ignored, whose personnel must not be allowed into the country, institutions from which documents must be concealed and access to officials prevented. (...) The UN Human Rights Council is a strange body with enlightened democratic members like Iran, Cuba, Kuwait and Libya. Since its establishment in 2006, the council has released more than 50 condemnations of Israel – half the number for the entire rest of the world. (...) Experienced jurists and diplomats will always know how to bend investigations and complex legal procedures in their favor, or at least to make it difficult to use these against their countries. (...) Israel is a democracy with Western values, fighting to defend its citizens. The IDF acted in Operation Protective Edge in keeping with the instructions of its legal advisers, documenting all military moves. Israel will have no problem dealing with any investigative body. In fact, Israel has the tools to place Hamas in the dock. The Israeli government must deal with the claims of the international community as an active player. It must involve procedural reasoning with elemental work based on the variety of materials we have at our disposal. Israel turning its back on the world will not stop the investigation or the report; all this will do will be to leave the terror organizations as the sole spokesmen in the international halls of justice. In such a game, it really is impossible to win.

Eli Avidar, HAA, 31.12.14

3. Streit bei Parteiführung der Shas

Shas-Chef Aryeh Deri verlässt die Partei, und auch die Knesset-Parlamentarier wollen von ihren Ämtern zurücktreten. Auslöser des Streits in der orientalisch-orthodoxen Partei war ein privat aufgezeichnetes Video aus dem Jahr 2008, das den inzwischen verstorbenen Partei-Mentor Rabbi Ovadia Yosef zeigt, wie er Deri scharf kritisiert und einen „Dieb“ schimpft. Deri hatte wegen Bestechlichkeit mehrere Jahre im Gefängnis verbracht und erst im vorvergangenen Jahr erneut die Parteiführung übernommen. Ob sein Rücktritt als Partei-Chef nun endgültig ist, wird bezweifelt.

Shas theater of the absurd

(...) Here is a recount of what happened: On Sunday, a new tape showed the late Shas spiritual leader Rabbi Ovadia Yosef lambasting Deri. He did not mince words. The following day, Yosef's sons and daughters visited their father's grave to ask for forgiveness. They said they were sorry his memory had been disgraced by the new footage. (...) On Monday, the evening news reported Deri's dramatic announcement. This was the opening shot for the "Day of Courting." For the next 24 hours, MKs practically begged Deri to change his mind. Rabbis wrote letters. Shas politicians vowed to resign. Deri supporters once again pitched the "Lion's Roar" tent (which plays on Deri's first name, which means "lion"), (...) because they wanted "Deri to continue leading the revolution." (...) Over the next few days we will inevitably see the "Deri, please come back" campaign continue in full swing. The weekend supplements will include colorful feature pieces chronicling the events at the tent. Rabbis will lament the loss. Supporters will circulate pro-Deri petitions. And the Deri ethos will be touted once again. This circuitous reality could not all be one big media spin. Or maybe it is, after all.

Yehuda Shlezinger, IHY, 31.12.14

The Shas Saga

(...) It is noteworthy that in the video Yosef voiced no moral qualms about allowing a convicted criminal from returning to Shas. His concern was functional – will Deri's return help or harm the party? (...) For the uninitiated, the responses of Deri supporters to the video must seem strange. Did Shas voters need Yosef to tell them that Deri is a convicted criminal? (...) Shas's implosion was expected. But the decline of rabbinic influence on Israeli politics is a broader trend that should be welcomed. Religious-Zionists

were never overly impressed by bossy rabbis who, claiming to speak in God's name, interfered in political matters. (...) Even among the haredim there are signs of declining rabbinic influence or at the very least of a fracturing of centralized authority. (...) Shas's fratricide, Bayit Yehudi's insistence on autonomy from rabbinic control (...) are all positive developments. Increasingly, religious voters of all stripes are being forced to think for themselves instead of relinquishing their own common sense and relying blindly on a rabbi whose ability to make political decisions is no better than anyone else's. Indeed, it is humiliating to see a nonagenarian or a centenarian rabbi manipulated by canny politicians and functionaries. It is an affront to the haredi constituency's intellect when the ensuing "rabbinic decision" is handed over as if spoken from the throat of God. Religious faith is a comfort and a source of meaning for many. But it should not be allowed to interfere with the intellectual autonomy of voters. We want thinking constituencies, not captive electoral blocs.

Editorial, JPO, 29.12.14

Nothing more than a setup

(...) The tape in which Yosef attacks Deri and defends Yishai was not really a secret. (...) If Deri meant what he said in the heartbreaking and tearful letter, he (...) should resign for the public good. But he has no intention to do so. He did not fight for the Shas leadership for 10 years after getting out of prison just to quit over an old tape of Yosef speaking. This was a setup. Deri allowed himself to resign only because he knew he was protected and that the rabbis would oppose the move and order him to continue in the position. They did it faster than it would have been in a real drama -- by Monday night they had already returned him to his position. The bluff ended at the same time as the evening news. The way both sides have carried on is embarrassing. Yosef's daughter, Adina Bar-Shalom, who had intended to run in Moshe Kahlon's Kulanu list, burst into tears on her father's grave on Monday in Deri's service. Is this politics? (...) At its foundation, this is (...) an attempt for the House of Yosef to maintain its centrality in the Sephardi-haredi community's public life and in the struggle between two groups of rabbis for control over the street and the party. There is only one real benefit that has come out of this embarrassing piece of theater: Shas (...) number of seats in the next Knesset will shrink.

Dan Margalit, IHY, 30.12.14

4. Medienquerschnitt

Kartelle bei der Gasgewinnung

Israel shoots itself in both knees

(...) The head of the Antitrust Regulatory Authority, David Gilo, announced that he had changed his mind and was reversing his decision of last March, in a formal agreement signed with Delek and Noble Energy, and had now decided that the partners must divest themselves of either the Tamar field or the Leviathan field. This, after billions of dollars of investment and multiple agreements with the Israeli government, including the antitrust authority itself, as mentioned above. This decision, or rather reversal, is not only an ethically reprehensible move on the part of the authority, but if carried out will inevitably damage the most important natural resource ever found in Israel, jeopardizing energy self-sufficiency and export revenues. It also brings into question gas supply contracts already signed with Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority, thereby severely damaging not only the international reputation of Israel as a reliable business partner, but the whole geo-strategic regional value of the gas (and eventually oil) finds. This is not Israel shooting itself in the foot, it is Israel shooting itself in both knees. This incredibly stupid, illegal and immoral decision will undoubtedly be reversed by the courts and/or international arbitral tribunals, but by the time that happens much of the damage will have been done and recovery will be difficult or perhaps impossible. (...)

Norman Bailey, TOI, 25.12.14

Haftlager Holot bleibt offen

Justice for asylum seekers buried in the sands

(...) As of now, the state can detain more asylum seekers in the Holot facility, as well as continue to detain the more than 2,000 asylum seekers who have been there for many months. The decision means that their right to freedom will continue to be denied, despite two High Court of Justice rulings that detaining asylum seekers without trial is intolerable. (...) The situation now allows the repetition of an invalid practice, in which the state exploits the 90 days it is allotted for implementing the High Court judgments to pass new legislation that suffers from the same constitutional defects. The result is that asylum seekers continue to be imprisoned and the freedom promised by the courts evaporates. Even if the latest amendment is struck down, as it should be, the same scenario could repeat itself: The state

will use the new 90 days to legislate a fourth amendment to the law, while the asylum seekers continue to languish in Holot. The time that the Holot detainees have spent there, deprived of their freedom, can never be restored to them. So long as new detentions continue and the current detainees remain there, the justice promised by the High Court of Justice will remain buried in the sands.
Editorial, HAA, 31.12.14

Wieder Schusswechsel an Gazagrenze

When deterrence deteriorates – shoot fiercely

(...) Hamas leaders have repeatedly stated of late that they do not want an escalation and wish for things to remain calm so that Gaza's rebuilding can go ahead unhindered. (...) Hamas doesn't want an escalation, but the delays in the Strip's reconstruction and the distress of the population could see the organization come to the conclusion that only by renewing the armed conflict will it be able to extricate itself and the Strip's residents from the current economic and rebuilding stagnation. (...) Israel itself is actually doing more than anyone else to help the Palestinians, but the rebuilding is moving ahead at a snail's pace. (...) In October, the donor countries promised a sum of \$5.4 billion, but have come up with just \$100 million thus far. (...) Another reason Hamas is initiating, or not preventing, hostile incidents is because it is responding to shooting incidents carried out by Israel along the border. Recently, the IDF has killed and wounded several Palestinians who tried to scale the fence or stage demonstrations near it. The Palestinians who tried to cross into Israel were not armed and most were desperate Strip residents hoping to find work in Israel. (...) At the same time, the military wing is expanding and establishing new strongholds – not only to signal to Israel that it is ready for another confrontation, but also to be able to cope better with such a confrontation (...) the deterrence Israel achieved from Operation Protective Edge is weakening. (...) Meanwhile, Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon and his aides are working with the Egyptians and other elements to stabilize the ceasefire, and the government's coordinator in the territories is working with PA President Mahmoud Abbas to forward Gaza's rebuilding. This combination of an immediate and decisive IDF response while assisting in the reconstruction of the Strip is the policy Israel has adopted to prevent an escalation.

Ron Ben-Yishai, JED, 25.12.14

Erwartungen an vorgezogene Neuwahlen

Israel's next leader must focus on social issues

The State of Israel's next prime minister needs the popular leadership qualities and credibility of Moshe Kahlon, the intelligence and sophistication of Isaac Herzog, the charisma of Yair Lapid, and the motivation and determination of Naftali Bennett. He or she needs to be able to reach an agreement with the Palestinians based on the principle of two states for two people, and to undertake to present such an agreement to the Israeli public in the form of a referendum. But this is not the main issue. The next leader will have to maintain his or her focus on Israeli society, on the hundreds of thousands who took to the streets three and half years ago. The next leader cannot allow the political issue to overshadow the social one, because a society's true strength stems from within. (...) The Israeli public wants its next leader to tackle the cost of living in Israel. It needs affordable housing, and wants a better public transport system, water and electricity at sane prices, more public hospital beds, and fewer children in school classrooms. (...) The left-right political division is paralyzing Israeli society and preventing it from falling into line with the world's developed countries and leading economies. (...) Social reform, righting the wrongs of the political system and a peace settlement – these are huge tasks that require cooperation. Israel's next leader has to be a team player – and perhaps we may even need a team of leaders and not a single individual – a team that has the wherewithal to rise above the day-to-day politics and party infighting, to set objectives and timetables, and to work towards them together. (...)

Ronny Douek, JED, 30.12.14

Channel 10 in Zahlungsschwierigkeiten

Media Comment: A very dark screen, indeed

Without warning, Channel 10 stopped broadcasting this past Sunday evening. The normal screen disappeared, and all the television viewer could see was a poster, in black and white. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was portrayed using the manipulative low-angle shot, which distorts features and implants a negative image. The poster's text, published by the station's employees committee, read: "In three more days, Channel 10 will close. (...) The finger-pointing at Netanyahu was in reality disconnected from the station's true problems. For over a decade, the station has failed to repay incentives, loans and state-sponsored investment funds. (...)

Channel 10 has been receiving almost unanimous support this past week from the media and the politicians who have an ax to grind with Netanyahu.

Elections can indeed be a tremendous boon, as the station proved two years ago when the Knesset forgave it hundreds of millions of shekels of debts and commitments. (...) This past week has witnessed a major scandal, as yet unproven, of bribes and misappropriations of public funds. The central accusation is that politicians conditioned their support for certain causes upon kickbacks. Channel 10 is doing, and has done, precisely the same thing: threatening politicians, especially the prime minister, to extort from them funding for its own coffers. Despite the obvious parallel, no advocate of Channel 10 is confronted with questions about the morality of the channel's practices. (...) There are two other channels who could take over the space left by Channel 10 if permitted to do so. In other words, closing the channel down would only lead to better TV: more pluralism, fresh voices and higher-quality programming. (...)

Yisrael Medad, Eli Pollak, JPO, 31.12.14

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