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1. Knappe Mehrheit stimmt für den Haushalt

Mit knapper Mehrheit von den Stimmen dreier Parlamentarier_innen verabschiedete die israelische Knesset den Haushalt für das Jahr 2022. Auch dem Haushalt für das laufende Jahr stimmten die Abgeordneten kurz zuvor zu. Die Regierung unter Ministerpräsident Naftali Bennett von der ultrarechten Yamina-Partei hat damit eine weitere wichtige Hürde genommen. Stichtag für den Haushalt 2021 war der 14. November. Ein Scheitern hätte die automatische Auflösung der Knesset bedeutet und Neuwahlen innerhalb von 90 Tagen. Zuletzt hatte die Knesset einen Haushalt im März 2018 für das Jahr 2019 verabschiedet. Seither wurde das Land jeweils auf Basis des Vorjahreshaushalts regiert.

A budget that will be good for Israel

The 2022 budget is an outstanding one. It is accompanied by an unprecedented "Arrangements Law," which contains 27 reforms. If executed as proposed, these reforms will change the direction of the economy and drive it forward. (...) The current Arrangements Law spans all walks of life: It raises the retirement age of women to 65, a move driven by necessity (...); a reform in the Standards Institute that will expose the economy to competing imports, driving prices down; the promotion of urban renewal to increase the supply of apartments, as part of a plan for tearing down older buildings and building new ones in which occupants get new apartments; the cancellation of pension-gear bonds, which will

lead to large budgetary savings; imposing "congestion fees" on drivers entering Tel Aviv to alleviate traffic jams; starting the construction of a light rail system in the metropolitan Tel Aviv area; contending with bureaucratic excess; managerial flexibility in the school system, which will allow principals to run their schools; easy transition between banks, aimed at reducing interest rates and commissions; and privatization of kashrut regulation. All these reforms will lead to growth, employment and a rise in living standards. (...) Obviously, legislating reforms is not enough. Also needed is political stability that will buy time to allow the implementation of these reforms. The last thing the economy needs now is another election.

Editorial, HAA, 03.11.21

With new state budget, Israel finally frees itself from economic uncertainty

(...) After 22 months without a budget or thorough economic plan, and nearly 44 months since the approval of the last spending bill, a specter of gloom and vitriol haunts the Knesset's halls. (...) Israel is set to do away with the negligent administration of the former prime minister, which for two years and amid a global recession caused by the coronavirus pandemic, refused to pass a budget. (...) If the bill fails to pass in the plenum, the coalition has ten days to reintroduce the bill. And now we reach the NIS 609 billion question: Is this budget good for Israel? First, just the sheer fact that a budget is

being approved is good on its own and things like retirement homes and facilities for at-risk youths can finally be budgeted. On the other hand, new reforms like the plastic tax, may help the environment, but it will likely be a heavy burden on large families. (...)

Gad Lior, YED, 03.11.21

Now that the budget has passed, the brawling will begin

Following the celebratory statements on the impressive achievement of passing a state budget, a minor issue that has been completely blown out of proportion, and a promise from Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and his senior cabinet members that now the coalition would get to work, a government meeting was held that served to remind all Israelis of the prospects for this government's promises. (...) All the aforementioned ministers should have authorized legislation to regulate settlements in Judea and Samaria, a subject they and Bennett (...) had promised to support. Of course, this did not happen (...) the ministers chose to soften the proposal and not to authorize it. (...) we are told at countless press conferences, the government is working for citizens, pushing the country forward, and freeing Israel from continued political stagnation. The reality however is slightly different, if not the polar opposite. The growing political crisis has resulted in an unprecedented government of paralysis that includes radical components that need to be placated at every turn. (...) It is not just extreme ideological rifts, but the weak and unstable government majority that will make it difficult for the coalition to achieve its objectives. As soon as either the Right or Left decides to unilaterally support personal legislation and cease to maintain coalitionary discipline, the brawling will begin. We could see a legislative war that results in a total loss of control as all sides look to pull the government in their direction, just as they have done when the state budget was on the table.

Mati Tuchfeld, IHY, 08.11.21

Israel has no justifiable reason to raise consumer prices

Three exhausting years of waiting for the state budget have come to an end (...) with a victory in the Knesset for the strangest and most diverse coalition ever seen in Israel. Israel needed a state budget like people need oxygen to breathe. (...) It's great the budget was passed, but at what cost? Alongside innovative reforms adorned with cautious optimism, the passing of the bill will likely follow by a dream-crushing economic reality for many Israelis. A reality

where young couples raise their children without the ability to purchase a home; where people work day and night just to make it through the month, and come back to a tiny apartment, because that's all they can afford to rent; where people systematically settle for a lower quality of life, wishing for better days. (...) Now, with the upcoming wave of new taxes and price hikes, the already impoverished families will also find themselves forced to give up on a dream of creating a better future for their children, to prevent another generation from growing in poverty, which would only increase inequality. (...) The long-awaited budget brought a lot of hope, but it also shattered many dreams along the way, especially coming off a pandemic-induced economic crisis. (...) Israel needs to acknowledge that some households are far from returning to their pre-pandemic life. And for them, the upcoming price increases are another nail in the coffin.

Hadar Gil-Ad, YED, 10.11.21

Finally, a Government

(...) It's a government! Finally, after four elections in two years (...). The present government is somewhat assured of being in power at least half of its four year term. (...) the government is far from a rightist government (...) Israel now has a budget until 2023 (...), the Haredi (ultra Orthodox) parties aren't in the coalition, and even if they deign to join it they won't wield much power. (...) This coalition will probably re-enact legislation of particular interest to American Jews: the portion of the Western Wall designated for mixed gender worship may regain the legitimacy (...). Emphasis will be placed on improving relations with America's majority non-Orthodox Jewish population and Americans in general. (...).

Steve Kramer, TOI, 11.11.21

2. Unter Spionageverdacht in Istanbul

Unter dem Verdacht der Spionage wurden zwei israelische Staatsbürger_innen in Istanbul festgenommen. Das Paar, das erklärtermaßen eine Geburtstagsreise in die Türkei unternahm, wurde festgenommen, weil es ein Haus von Präsident Recep Tayyip Erdogan fotografiert haben soll. Erst als die beiden israelischen Staatsbürger_innen nicht planmäßig wieder in ihrer Heimat landeten, leitete die besorgte Familie Nachforschungen in die Wege. In der Türkei ist es grundsätzlich verboten, in militärischen und Sicherheitszonen ohne Genehmigung Fotos zu machen. Bereits im Oktober berichteten türkische Medien von der Verhaftung mehrerer is-

raelischer Agent_innen. Türkische Ermittler hätten ein Netzwerk von 15 Menschen entdeckt, die im Auftrag des israelischen Geheimdienstes Mossad Student_innen ausgespäht haben sollen, so meldete ein türkischer Fernsehkanal. Das Ehepaar – zwei Busfahrer_innen aus der Stadt Modi'in – wurde inzwischen aufgrund von Gesprächen zwischen Präsident Erdogan und dem israelischen Präsidenten Isaac Herzog sowie Premierminister Bennett und Außenminister Lapid freigelassen und nach Israel zurück gebracht.

Calling Erdogan "Jew" deemed as insult

Calling Turkey's President Erdogan "Jew" deemed "insulting" by the Turkish court. A person named Yüksel Üstün, living in Bursa has declared the following statement on his Facebook account in 2020: "Tayyip is a Jew who pretends to be a Muslim". Bursa Chief Public Prosecutor's Office filed a lawsuit against Mr. Üstün after the Ministry of Justice gave permission to prosecute for insulting the President. In the indictment, it was argued that the suspect committed the alleged crime by "offending the honor, honor and dignity of the President" with this post. Erdoğan's lawyer stated that the defendant targeted the President by using expressions that offend the President's honor, dignity and prestige, and publicly committed the crime by targeting his personality, dignity and reputation. (...) In the complaint petition of Erdoğan's lawyer Hüseyin Aydın, the expression "Jew" against Erdoğan was evaluated as "humiliating, damaging to honor and dignity". (...)

Jack E. Civre, TOI, 10.11.21

Israel must not let Erdogan exploit his Israeli 'hostages'

(...) a court in Istanbul has extended the detention of Israeli tourists Natali and Mordy Oknin on the grounds they allegedly spied (...). It appears the Turkish attorney's demand their detention be extended is sending signals that the innocent incident, which took place at the new tourist observation point in Istanbul, is turning into a diplomatic crisis between Jerusalem and Ankara. (...) Those who follow Turkish foreign policy know all too well that such "hostage" cases can be solved in one of two ways: the soft power displayed by Berlin or the tough diplomatic stance adopted by former US President Donald Trump. When Ankara arrested Turkish-German journalist Deniz Yücel on suspicion of terrorist propaganda and incitement of the people in 2017 (...) Ankara had only agreed to free Yücel in return for an end to German sanctions on Turkey's military indus-

try. (...) Ankara pulled the same "gun" on the US when (...) it imprisoned an American priest by the name of Andrew Bronson on suspicion of espionage. Unlike Germany, the US chose (...) to enact sanctions on senior Turkish officials involved in the affair. Ultimately, Turkey was forced to fold and release the priest. It's no secret that over the years, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has made a political fortune back home by starting crises with non-Muslim states, and Israel in particular. This is how he has succeeded in distracting the Turkish public from the burning domestic issues of the day. (...) Jerusalem must do everything in its power to bring about the release of the innocent couple, including by making use of its ties in Washington and Berlin.

Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak, IHY, 14.11.21

Has Erdogan backed himself into a corner this time?

Natalie and Mordy Oknin of Modi'in are without a doubt two very sophisticated spies. They underwent long training in the Mossad, which included using a cellphone camera, and Natalie's lipstick was really full of invisible ink. Photographing what's been described as a residence of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was supposed to be their last mission before Natalie was promoted to run Tevel, the Mossad's liaison unit. Mordy is apparently a candidate for replacing one of the three division heads who have resigned from the spy agency after the radical reorganization being implemented there by its new director. (...) The arrest of the Oknins on suspicion of espionage didn't surprise any Turks. After all, any person using social media knows not to use the term "Erdogan" in their electronic chats or posts. (...) a mention of the president's name in a conversation (...) was enough to arouse the suspicions of a waiter, who rushed to inform the police about it. (...) The arrest of foreign citizens is nothing new in Turkey. In recent years, dozens of Russians, Americans, Brits and others have been arrested for a long list of alleged crimes, including espionage, having ties to ISIS or for supporting exiled religious leader Fethullah Gulen or the Kurdistan Workers Party, which has been designated a terrorist organization. (...) The question now is whether Erdogan has backed himself into a corner – and whether he is even interested in a way out.

Zvi Bar'el, HAA, 14.11.21

Israel is taken for a ride on Erdogan's 'Midnight Express'

The Israeli couple, who found themselves arrested in Turkey (...) are merely unfortunate pawns in the decrepit sultan's twisted game of political survival. The pair could have easily been Dutch or American, but Israelis are far "sexier." The term "connections to the Mossad" always makes great headlines. This is all part of Erdogan's plan: Get as many headlines as you can to divert the Turkish people's criticism away from himself, his party and his ebbing popularity. Concocting diplomatic crises (...) has been a reoccurring strategy to boost his standing in the polls. Over the past few years, Erdogan has already played this trick with Germany, Russia, the Netherlands, the U.S. and even China. (...) Turkey's attempt to spark a diplomatic incident with Israel last month over the arrest of 15 men alleged to be Mossad agents spying on Hamas officials in the country did not really pan out and did not really provide the boost in the polls Erdogan was looking for. In the end, no one could really confirm who these "agents" worked for, all of whom were Palestinian Muslims from the Gaza Strip. And then came the vacationing Israeli couple. (...) Turkish and Israeli officials will hold backchannel talks where Ankara will demand more and more from Jerusalem. This wishlist might include bettering Turkey's political standing on the Temple Mount through their agencies operating at the complex, a public apology for alleged spying and additional relief efforts for Hamas in Gaza. (...) Unable to force any sanctions in retaliation, Jerusalem has become Erdogan's personal punching bag.

Alex Fishman, YED, 14.11.21

Israel can hit Turkey where it hurts the most

(...) Israel's initial assessment was that the couple was arrested due to local authorities trying to "make a splash," and that the matter would be resolved quickly. However, the Turkish court's decision not to expel Mordy and Natalie Oknin and rather extend their remand in custody by 20 days, led Israeli officials to believe that certain elements in Turkey want to exploit the affair to create an intentional diplomatic crisis with Israel – among other reasons, due to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his government's dwindling popularity amid the country's faltering economy. (...) At this stage, Israel wants to keep handling the matter discreetly. (...) Israel, however, needs to prepare for the possibility that Turkey will choose the crisis course. (...) Israel will have to consider changing its approach to Turkey. The first step will have to be to issue an official

travel warning. The immediate consequence of such a move will be to hamper Israeli tourism to Turkey. In a period of struggling global tourism due to the global coronavirus pandemic, a measure of this sort will hit Turkey in its pocket. Israel can also warn Israelis not to fly through Istanbul, one of Turkish Airlines' busiest gateways to the rest of the world. Such a move would also have economic ramifications for Turkish airlines in general, which view Israel as a strategic market.(...) Relations with Turkey have been strained for many years now, but thus far the sides have made sure to separate their diplomatic disputes from their economic relations. (...) Israel should hold a deep strategic debate with itself to determine its future policy regarding Turkey. (...) Until then, all Israelis should do the obvious: stay away from trouble (...) just stay away from Turkey. Yoav Limor, IHY, 15.11.21

3. Pegasus auch in den palästinensischen Gebieten

Die israelische Spionagesoftware Pegasus der Firma NSO, die im Sommer für internationale Schlagzeilen sorgte, kam auch bei der Überwachung palästinensischer Menschenrechtsaktivist_innen zum Einsatz. Die mit Hilfe der digitalen Wanze erlangten Informationen waren offenbar Grundlage für die jüngste Entscheidung von Verteidigungsminister Benny Gantz, sechs Organisationen der palästinensischen Zivilgesellschaft aufgrund der Unterstützung einer Terrororganisation als illegal zu erklären. Dem Verdacht nach unterhalten die Organisationen Verbindungen zur Volksfront zur Befreiung Palästinas (PFLP), die auch von der EU als Terrororganisation eingestuft wird. Beweise für diese Beschuldigung bleibt das israelische Verteidigungsministerium bislang schuldig. Die Spionagesoftware kann Gespräche mithören und unbemerkt die Kamera auf dem Mobiltelefon starten, Chats, Fotos und Kontakte auslesen oder auch Standortdaten erheben. NSO verkauft sie nach eigenen Angaben nur zur Kriminalitäts- und Terrorismusbekämpfung an Behörden. Vor einigen Monaten wurde bekannt, dass die digitale Wanze in den Mobiltelefonen führender Politiker_innen weltweit, darunter Staats- und Regierungschef_innen, Diplomaten_innen, Journalist_innen und Menschenrechtsaktivist_innen in Einsatz war. Das US-Handelsministerium reagierte mit Sanktionen gegen das israelische Unternehmen.

Is Israel's cyber industry facing a bigger threat?

Wednesday's decision by the US Commerce Department to blacklist Israeli spyware developers NSO Group (...) came as a complete shock to Israel, with the Foreign and Defense ministry learning of it mere hours before it became public. (...) this decision clouds the Israel offensive cyber industry as a whole. The (...) share of Israeli defense exports may not be high, but it is a growth catalyst in terms of expertise and innovations. This is why more than a few entities – from hostile countries, through human rights organizations to commercial rival – have been working in a variety of ways to undermine this industry, as it would also deal a strategic blow to Israel's state-level capabilities. (...) It doesn't matter that for the most part, the fact that such software is used to fight crime and thwart terrorist attacks. The fact that some countries abused them has cast doubt over the operations of the industry as a whole. The damage this has inflicted on the industry's image is massive and it could have a financial, diplomatic and, potentially, security impact.

Yoav Limor, IHY, 04.11.21

The NSO affair is a national failure for Israel

(...) Above all, it is the failure of former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Under his leadership, Israel suffered from diplomatic shortsightedness when it came to cyber exports. It "sacrificed" Western longtime friends like France and the United States for the sake of warming ties with Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States and Morocco – all NSO clients. Under Netanyahu, NSO blossomed (...) wherever he marked diplomatic targets, the footprint of the Pegasus Project could be found. Netanyahu tightened ties with Arab countries (...) and with Eastern European autocracies (Hungary), and Pegasus popped up in those places, frequently after intercession by the defense establishment. The Israeli justice system must also be added to the list of bodies that failed in this regard. Despite a number of petitions on the matter, it always found in favor of NSO, behind closed doors, of course. (...) Israel, as a country, failed to realize the limitations of power, especially the change of global discourse in an age when citizens and governments are fighting to preserve their security and restore their loss of privacy due to technology.

Editorial, HAA, 07.11.21

The NSO affair: Why Jewish privacy ethics matter

(...) the US government blacklisted Israel's NSO Group for engaging in "transnational repression" and "activities contrary to the national security interests of the United States." These are serious charges. (...) Pegasus is powerful. It (...) provides virtually full access to a user's data. (...) Amazon Web Services has shut down NSO accounts. Facebook is suing NSO for allegedly hacking 1,400 WhatsApp clients. A prominent Israeli cybersecurity veteran has even called on tech companies not to hire former employees of companies like NSO. Others claim that this is all politics, that NSO is being unfairly targeted as part of the broader campaign to delegitimize Israel. (...) Troubling allegations regarding the conduct of Israeli companies should never be lightly dismissed, especially in a nation that aspires to ethical excellence. (...) What does Judaism have to say on the issue? (...) It cannot be silent when Jews are potentially involved in halachic misconduct that could hurt the innocent. A thousand years ago, Rabbeinu Gershom issued a cherem (ban) against the unauthorized reading of private letters. That cherem is still in place, and today would forbid intentionally eavesdropping on private telephone conversations or monitoring private data. Depriving somebody of privacy is prohibited even if the targeted party suffers no adverse consequences, let alone if the surveillance results in financial or physical injury, or in personal information being revealed. (...) Judaism expects (...) that businesses run by Jews will strive to have exemplary ethical standards with meticulous plans to protect the innocent, not to make them more vulnerable. (...) It is that moral vision of a Judaism that insists on the pursuit of public virtue that our rabbis would do well to champion.

Danny Schiff, JPO, 10.11.21

4. Medienquerschnitt

Gebetsrechte an der Klagemauer

President Herzog, the future of the Western Wall is in your hands

(...) The ball is now in the court of President Isaac Herzog (...) The task that now presents itself to President Herzog is nothing short of a life mission: restoring the Wall to its original glory, and reinstating Jerusalem as the city of peace. There is no act more Zionist than this. The task at hand may even become the defining moment of Herzog's term in of-

fice. He knows just how much the fight for freedom of prayer at the Western Wall is important to us, and he also knows – almost better than anyone else – the extent to which this issue has undermined Israel's relations with Diaspora Jewry. (...)

Dr. Yizhar Hess, YED, 08.11.21

President Herzog, don't give in to Western Wall hooligans

Many secular men and women believe that the battle over the Western Wall has nothing to do with them. Simply put, the dispute between those who insist on praying next to a wall doesn't interest them. (...) But the battle over the right of all the denominations of Judaism, men and women together or separately, to pray as they wish at the site that is sacred to all Jewish men and women, is an integral part of the battle over democratic-liberal values in Israel. It's a battle over the status of women, against the Orthodox monopoly over Judaism, against the status quo that is irrelevant to the 21st century, and in favor of pluralism and freedom of religion and worship for all. These are values that every secular-liberal Jew should want to promote. (...) President Isaac Herzog is well aware of all that. (...) he has dealt with it throughout his political career. That's why it was so disappointing to see his response at the end of last week, when he asked Reform lawmaker Gilad Kariv and Conservative lawmaker Alon Tal to stay away from the Western Wall "in order to prevent brawling and unnecessary baseless hatred among elected officials in front of the remains of our Temple," as he put it. (...) Who exactly was expected to be violent? Women in prayer shawls or demonstrators who were called on to preserve "the sanctity of the Western Wall"? (...) Herzog gave in to the hooligans instead of expressing a clear position in favor of freedom of worship and the status of women at the Western Wall. In doing so he thinks he behaved in a statesmanlike way and is preserving "unity." He isn't. He is preserving only the flawed status quo. (...) if Herzog continues to give in to hooliganism and religious coercion – we don't have much reason to rely on these discussions.

Noa Landau, HAA, 09.11.21

Impfungen für Kinder

Israel must vaccinate children for its own protection

Although a Health Ministry panel of experts approved the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine for children

aged 5–11 (...) its rollout will be shrouded by a cloud of uncertainty. Not everything is known about the long-term effects of the new vaccine, and that is an undisputed fact. (...) Some side effects — all of which were known from the beginning of the vaccination drive — were determined to be mild and temporary. Even myocarditis, which only appeared in rare occurrences, was never considered a good enough reason to avoid the Pfizer vaccine by any reputable health authority as opposed to other COVID-19 vaccines that were restricted or even pulled altogether due to safety concerns. Since most side effects appear over the first few weeks after take-up of the vaccine, the invaluable data collected shows that Pfizer's shot is safe for use in younger age groups, at least in the short term. (...) any potential adverse effects of the jabs — even the rarest of them — would have already been detected. As opposed to the potential dangers of the vaccine, which have not been seen anywhere, there is a real and well-documented danger posed by the disease itself. Although most children only experience mild symptoms of COVID-19, some can suffer horrid complications. Hundreds were hospitalized with severe illness while others endure the effects of long-COVID, and no one can say for how long. Children also suffered from social isolation during lockdowns. Many have developed depression and anxiety after being separated from their schools and friends. All those problems can be avoided or at the very least limited thanks to vaccines. (...)

Sarit Rosenblum, YED, 11.11.21

Israelische Hilfsaktion für afghanische Flüchtende

When Israelis do what Israel should be doing

Two inspiring rescue operations in early September and the beginning of October succeeded in evacuating 167 Afghan nationals from the chaos that followed the hasty exit of American forces and the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. (...) The needs and concerns of those in transit must be met. (...) Israel has a special obligation. While its citizens are fulfilling the letter and the spirit of the Jewish dictum, "whoever saves one life saves the entire world," it can no longer close its doors (...) to those in search of a foothold as they flee oppression, repression, and untold persecution. (...) Only a small group of countries has publicly committed to granting permanent asylum to Afghani refugees. (...) Israel is no exception. For a country founded by Jews seeking

refuge from antisemitism and systemic oppression, it refused to grant transit rights to the two groups extricated from Afghanistan by its own citizens. Despite entreaties from the highest quarters, Minister of Interior Ayelet Shaked has repeatedly rejected requests for safe passage (...) The government has an obligation to itself and to its Jewish heritage to offer succor to those in the gravest danger, lest they suffer the fate of their own ancestors. The ongoing Israeli-led Afghani rescue operation and the women at its helm are a living reminder of the strength of the human spirit in an increasingly complicated world. (...)

Naomi Chazan, TOI, 08.11.21

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Ein Krankenhaus für Sakhnin

Build a hospital in Sakhnin

(...) There is no disputing that northern Israel needs an additional hospital. But instead of building it in an Arab city, the current government is sticking with a plan approved by previous governments to build it in Kiryat Ata, which is less than 20 kilometers (...) from Haifa's Rambam Medical Center. In the area of Sakhnin, however, there is no hospital within a radius of over 30 kilometers. (...) The population of Sakhnin exceeds 32,000, and more than 25,000 people live in nearby Arabeh. At the level of principle, too, this is a misjudgment. How is it possible that, 73 years after the state was founded, not one Arab city in Israel has a public or government hospital? This is a decades-long failure, and it's time to correct it. (...) building a hospital in an Arab city must be a practical goal that should be implemented in the next few years. That's especially true since it plans to build another hospital in the north in any case, so all that's needed is to move the location from one area to another, where the need is greater. (...)

Editorial, HAA, 12.11.21

HAA = Haaretz

YED = Yedioth Ahronoth / Ynetnews

JPO = Jerusalem Post

IHY = Israel HaYom

TOI = Times of Israel

GLO = Globes