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ANDREI BELINSKY. "GAME OF THRONES". LEBANESE CLANS AND STATE IN GERMANY // *Article was written for the bulletin "Russia and the Moslem World."*

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Abstract. In the article it is analyzed the process of criminalization of Lebanese clans arrived in Germany in the early 1980s. It is noted that it was caused by a number of reasons, including the marginal situation of Lebanese immigrants, the lack of attention of the authorities to integration problems, specifics of mentality, etc. Starting with petit thefts and street drug trafficking, the clans gradually began to create their own economic structures, which included both

legal business and criminal activities (extortions, robbery, money laundering, etc.). At the end of the article, it is concluded that an effective fight against clan crime involves a set of measures that include not only police operations, but also the fight against the “business” of clans and work with their individual members.

Dual power

Provocative both by its design and its way the burglary of the Berlin Bode Museum which was carried out in 2017, could easily become the basis of the script for Hollywood thriller film or enter criminalistics textbooks as an illustrative example. On the night of March 27, 2017, three men dressed in black got off the Hackesher-Markt station and moved towards the museum along the railway tracks. At the railway embankment, an accomplice was waiting for them, who helped them climb into the museum window. The target of the criminals was the one hundred kilo gold coin “Big Maple Leaf”, the cost of which experts estimated at approximately 3.75 million euros¹. Bulletproof glass was broken by an ax, a coin was transported to the car using ropes and wheel barrow, after which it was lost without a trace².

The policemen investigating the case eventually got on the track of four members of the Lebanese clan Remmo, known in the crime rings of Berlin, who had already got in the crosshairs of German law enforcement agencies.

The robbery of the world-known museum was not just a famous crime, but an indicator that in many large German cities, along with traditional state institutions, informal structures are being formed that not only challenge existing laws, but also claim to impose their rules in those neighborhoods and areas which are under their control. This refers not only to the Salafi community, which activities have long been the subject of the most close monitoring by the German special services, but also Kurdish, Turkish and Lebanese clans. The latter have been for a long time for mainstream society “off scene”, but a number of high profile

crimes, including the Bode Museum robbery mentioned above, brought immigrants from Beirut to the top news charts in Germany, albeit with negative connotations.

Gradually, both in state structures and in society, the awareness comes that they deal not with small criminal gangs, but with rather strong clan structures, whose criminal activities (drug trafficking, money laundering, robberies) cause not only serious economic damage, but also questions the viability of the Basic Law of Germany. How did yesterday's refugees from Lebanon manage to turn into "kings" of the underworld of Germany?

Constant wanderers

The history of many Lebanese clans goes back to Asia Minor, which, according to some researchers, is their ancestral home. It was here where on the plateaus of Eastern Anatolia, for example, the famous Mkhamalli clan originated, which includes several thousand people. The uprising of the Kurds in 1925, who opposed the national policy pursued by the iron hand of M.K. Atatürk, violated the traditional way of life of Mkhamalli. Although members of the clan did not participate in the uprising directly, adhering to a neutral position in the conflict between Ankara and supporters of independent Kurdistan, the hostilities did not pay no attention to them. Economic devastation, reluctance to be attacked or repressed prompted Mkhamalli to migrate. Like the ancient Egyptians who fled from the wrath of Pharaoh from Egypt, many Kurds were forced to leave their historical homeland and go into exile. Among the immigrants there were representatives of the Mkhamalli clan, who found refuge in Lebanon, which became the "promised land" for thousands of refugees from all over the Middle East³. Subsequently, these "pioneers" were joined by their many relatives and tribesmen. However, unlike Armenians, who, thanks to the patronage of local Christians, quickly received Lebanese citizenship, and along with

that the opportunity to occupy the most promising niches of the economy, the new inhabitants of the country were deprived of such privileges, that could not affect both their situation and their attitude to state institutions. "Because of the blockade on the part of Christians, of course, they did not receive citizenship. Until 1994, when a decree was issued granting citizenship, Sunnis managed to naturalize only 10 per cent of this group."⁴

The 1975 civil war in Lebanon between Christian and Muslim communities, which killed tens of thousands of people, caused a surge of migration from the country, including western Europe. Among those who left the country in search of happiness were the famous clans Mkhamalli, Remmo, Al-Zein, who moved to Germany, which had long become a magnet for migrants from Southern Europe, Yugoslavia and Turkey⁵. The new homeland did not welcome Lebanese too much, just initially granting a temporary residence permit, which effectively blocked access to the legal labor market and hindered the integration of the community into German society. However, this circumstance in no way prevented the natives of a small Middle Eastern country from taking roots in Berlin, Duisburg, Hamburg, bringing their relatives and building their semi-underground economic "empire" step by step.

The "long road to the West" of Lebanese clans described above is not only a prelude to the main part of the article, but also largely provides the key to understanding why they found themselves on the other side of the law.

First, the nomadic way of life and constant movements from one region to another, as a result of wars, persecution, or an unfavourable economic situation, led Lebanese people to treat the state and its structures as something alien that had nothing to do with them. This was especially evident during the civil war in Lebanon, when Mkhamalli was alternately supported, now by Muslim, now by left-wing parties, depending on the interests of the clan. The result was an open disregard for both current laws

and the cultural traditions of the host country, especially when it came to states with cultures and religions alien to them⁶.

Secondly, constant armed conflicts and clashes between the participants, victims or witnesses were representatives of the Lebanese clans, leave their (usually negative) mark on the worldview and behavior of the representatives of the clans. The use or threat of force, aggression against opponents is a characteristic of behavior for many people from crisis, unstable regions (Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan, etc.)

Thirdly, despite the mass exodus of tens of thousands of refugees from Lebanon, the traditional clan structure has not only not weakened, but has also intensified. Its increase was due to both the influx of "fresh blood" in the person of relatives from the Middle East, and the fact that in an unfamiliar environment, it was the clan that gave protection and support to its members.

Finally, the weak integration of clans into the economy and society (lack of citizenship and access to the legal labour market)⁷ has determined the marginal position of Lebanese clans and, as a result, the tendency of their members to crime and illegal activities. "Of course, they fought, stole, trafficked drugs. If you don't have money and you don't go stealing, what will you do if you want to eat?" (Jamal Al Zayn, Justice of the Peace, representative of the Al Zayn clan). "According to the President of the Federal Criminal Police Department of Germany, Holger Münch, the German authorities made a mistake in the past when in the 1980-1990s Arab families arrived from Turkey in Germany and were able to turn into criminal clans. As a reason for this, he cited the fact that migrants without the prospect of obtaining citizenship or a residence permit settled in certain places, lived separately and were criminalized without sufficient consequences for themselves."⁹ In fact, the German state was the victim of its ambiguous migration policy, based on the reception of refugees from the Middle East and Africa on the one hand, and on the other on the rejection of their integration. And soon the authorities had to reap the benefits of their short views.

The publicist R. Ghadban, who had long lived in Lebanon, told in detail in his book "Clans, Underestimated Threat," about how in practice there was a process of involving migrants from Lebanon in criminal life in the 1980s: "In the beginning they went to supermarkets and shops and took everything they wanted. [...]. At first, the organization acted in trio: an observer, a distracter, a performer. Soon, cohesive gangs arose from them, who carried out more complex actions.¹⁰" Subsequently, powerful structures combining criminal activity and legal business were created of these gangs. And it was the clan structure that became the core around which all the financial activities of yesterday's refugees from Lebanon were built.

Backstage. How Lebanese clans are arranged

Lifting the curtain of secrecy over how Lebanese clans are actually arranged and functioning is difficult not only for an outside observer, but also for the special services and the police, which have a branched staff of informers and the latest surveillance tools.

The reason for the "opacity" of clans for law enforcement agencies is explained not only by the peculiarities of their structure (the inability to get into the clan for an outsider, marriages only between relatives), but also by the stringent security measures aimed at protecting against the "all-seeing eye" of the state. The same R. Ghadban describes in his book an episode that fully conveys this desire to keep any information about the clan a secret. "In Hessian Frankfurt, I was invited to a demonstration of solidarity against the expulsion of members of the Mkhamalli clan. Of course, there were a lot of Mkhamalli in the hall. I made notes of clan relationships. It's a usual practice if you want to imagine the position of the group. Suddenly, a young man sprang from his seat and accused me of the will to give away the internal affairs of the clan. His neighbors began to stroke him down, perhaps they explained to him that I had

received information from the head of the clan, anyway he calmed down¹¹."

To some extent, reports of law enforcement agencies in Germany, investigations of journalists, and sometimes honest evidence of clan members themselves help shed light on the situation inside Lebanese families.

The traditional Lebanese clan consists of several thousand people who, despite the geographical dispersion (Germany, the countries of Western Europe, Lebanon), are closely connected by family ties¹². In turn, clans are divided into families in which the patriarchal-archaic way still exists. "There is a strict understanding of roles in clans that concerns both the relationship of the sexes and the hierarchy¹³."

Fathers are at the head of the clan or family who, along with leadership, act as justices of the peace, as well as educate young people. The latter is given special attention, since the younger generation must follow accepted customs and traditions. From early childhood, a cult of strength, masculinity, the need to protect the honor of the family, which should be defended by all possible means, has been implanted in young people. At the same time, the "pain threshold" is quite low and one side glance or carelessly spoken word is enough to start a conflict. This circumstance often leads to very aggressive behavior of members of Lebanese clans towards both rivals and servants of the German Themis. The influence and power of their clan is usually emphasized by demonstration of luxury goods (expensive cars) or organization of impressive public events (weddings, birthdays), which can be attended by several hundred guests. Women are given the traditional, for Muslim families, role of the guardian of the hearth and bearer of the clan which effectively excludes their participation in all important issues within the clan¹⁴.

The high numbers, close blood-related ties and willingness to use force against the opponent ultimately helped the immigrants from Lebanon to take a worthy place under the

criminal sun of Berlin, squeezing out biker gangs and the Albanian mafia after brief but bloody wars¹⁵.

“Monopoly” with a Lebanese accent

In the early 1930s at the height of the Great Depression, Pennsylvania unemployed Charles Darrow patented the board game Monopoly, which conquered the United States and then the rest of the world with the speed of the telegraph. The board game gave anyone the opportunity to feel like a manager or banker for a while, to develop strategic thinking, logic and intuition.

The financial business empire Organized by Lebanese clans in large cities of Germany can be easily compared with Monopoly. There is everything: the development of entrepreneurship, the fight against competitors, millions of dollars, risk. However, there are two circumstances that distinguish the American Monopoly from the Lebanese one. Realistic and often criminal nature.

The business model of the Mkhamalli, Remmo and Miri clans is based on a close interweaving of legal business, “gray schemes” and outright criminal activity, including drug trafficking, extortion and reprisals of all unwelcomed.

The official top of this iceberg, called the “clan economy,” is a network of hookah bars, vegetable and fruit shops, and eateries, designed once again to demonstrate to the authorities the legality and transparency of the entrepreneurial activities of immigrants from a small Middle Eastern country. However, behind the showcase of this decency there is a completely different world, living according to its unwritten laws. The house-checks belonging to the influential Al-Zain clan demonstrated the luxury and wealth of Lebanese families, albeit inferior to the treasures of Arab sheikhs, but still contrasting with the modest status of poor migrants from the Middle East. “From the record of a search of a grand-uncle, an unemployed recipient of the Hartz IV allowance:” A Rolex watch was found in the sleeping room in the original box. 2795 euros were found in the pocket of the accused’s

jeans. "Another 3,800 euros were found under the fitted sheets.¹⁶" In addition, law enforcement officers confiscated Porsche 996 car from a clan representative. Such paintings can be observed with an incredibly regular basis in German media reports.

The sources of income of Lebanese families are as diverse as the methods by which they increase their welfare. The high profitability of shisha bars is not only due to the popularity of such institutions among young people, but also to the "marketing" strategy of their owners. In 2018, authorities discovered in Zolingen an underground factory producing tobacco for hookahs. With a cost price of 5-10 euros per kilogram, it was afterwards sold in bars at a price of 50-70 euros¹⁷.

However, the basis for the well-being of Lebanese clans is still criminal activity - drug trafficking, intimidation, fraud, etc. In the early 1980s immigrants from Beirut came onto the radar of the Berlin opposition because of distribution of drugs. And in the early 1990s after a short but cruel war with the Albanian Osmani clan, they captured most of the market. "In Mkhamalli's collective memory, the conflict with the Albanians in Berlin got the features of the myth of victory and the beginning of their rule.¹⁸"

Over time, other criminal "crafts" were added to the drug trade, which contributed to the enrichment of Arab and Kurdish families. Along with robberies and thefts, which have already become the landmark of the clans, they included extortion and call for large sums of money for "protection." The most common scheme of intimidation by Lebanese clans is as follows. After buying a car or household appliances, the seller received a call from the buyer demanding compensation for the allegedly existing damage. In case of refusal, he received threats of physical violence, which forced hundreds of people to transfer money regularly, including abroad, to Lebanon. Having passed the "cleansing" through local banks, the money of the clans returns to Germany, where they are invested in real estate and legal business.

The influence of the clans extended even to such an area as show business. The story of the famous German rapper Bushido

(Anis Mohammed Youssef Ferchichi), who for almost 14 years collaborated with the Abu Shaker clan, which received half of the singer's income¹⁹ for his patronage, received great resonance in the media and among the public. However, in 2018, the "romance" between the famous musical performer and the criminal world ended, which resulted in mutual reproaches, which were soon followed by threats from Abu Shaker. Another Lebanese clan – Remmo saved "Bushido" from reprisal.

The real power of government structures

The strength and danger of Lebanese clans are best shown by figures of police statistics. From 2016 to 2018, in one federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia, representatives of clans committed about 14,000 different delicts and crimes²⁰.

"We overslept"²¹ – the Minister of the Interior of the North Rhine - Westphalia H. Rail had to admit. Indeed, the State's long-standing policy towards Lebanese clans, which was based on an inaccurate evaluation of the situation, was not particularly successful. Searches, arrests and criminal cases – the usual tools used in the fight against criminal gangs, turned out to be ineffective in the conflict with Remmo, Miri and Al-Zain. "Investigators report: Children already make fun of the police, because they were taught not to show them any respect. Wives ridicule them because they know the evidence."²² Even the prospect of imprisonment could not prevent the criminal activities of clans. "The mother whose sons ended up in prison said goodbye with the last words:" Prison makes a man."²³

In this situation, both the law enforcement system of Germany and political parties require a new strategy for immigrants from Lebanon, which should go beyond the traditional police operations and include measures against the clan system itself, and not only individual (albeit very influential) members.

This primarily concerns the economic basement of Arab and Kurdish families. A special police report on the activities of clans in Germany noted that one of the main fears of members of the clan, along with fall, is the loss of money or economic resources²⁴. That is why the main blow must be launched on the business of Lebanese families, depriving them of the support that allows them to feel confident in a foreign country.

In addition, great attention should be paid to work with young people, on which the situation in the migrant quarters of Essen, Duisburg, Berlin will depend. There is no doubt that, this task is much more difficult than the fight against the illegal "business" of clans, since the younger generation is connected with their family with a strong "umbilical", and the authority of state bodies (school, social departments) is extremely low.

However, only this trine of measures – police operations, the fight against economic crimes, and work with young people – will be able to snatch the roots that Lebanese clans put down in the 1980s in Germany.

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2. Police and criminalists suggest that the criminals melted the coin to cover their tracks.
3. It should be noted that Lebanon gave refuge to Armenians, Palestinians, Druze, and in recent years – Syrians. This circumstance led to a rather mixed ethno-confessional composition of the country, and as a result – numerous conflicts.
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5. The route of Lebanese clans arriving in Europe is also very notable. The initial goal of the refugees from Lebanon was Tempelhof Airport in East Berlin, from where they moved to the western part of the city to get to Germany.
6. However, a number of researchers note that following the norms of religion within clans is quite selective and is determined by clan interests.

7. Both the clumsy legislation of Germany and reluctance of the German authorities to deal with the problem of migrants contributed to this.
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12. As it was noted above, marriages within the clan contributed to the strengthening of blood-related ties, and group cohesion.
13. Polizei Nordrhein Westfalen. Arabische Familienclans – Historie. Analyse. Ansätze zur Bekämpfung. 2020. P. 9.
14. Within clans, as in many Muslim families, the so-called honor killings (Ehrenmord – German) are quite common, which give members of the clan the right to take the life of a wife or sister for betrayal or deviations from the norms.
15. It is noteworthy that outside the clan, young Kurds and Arabs had almost no friends. During the conversation with representatives of Lebanese clans in the mid-1990s almost all teenagers were surprised to respond to the question of the presence of acquaintances among classmates, neighbors, etc. This explains the hostility of Lebanese clans towards the world around them and the cruelty to strangers. Ghadban R. Arabische Clans. Unterschätzte Gefahr. Ullstein Buchverlage GmbH, Berlin. 2018. P. 146.
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19. The cooperation of clans with representatives of show business was due not only to financial considerations, but also to the desire to increase their image and authority in a certain part of society.
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