

Austria ditches Turkish driving theory test

Vienna, Austria

Learner drivers in Austria will no longer be able to take their theory test in Turkish, the transport ministry announced on Saturday, blaming the cost of translating the exam.

Of the nearly 300,000 theory tests taken last year, only 3,631 were conducted in Turkish -- or 1.2 percent of the total.

There are around 360,000 people of Turkish origin in Austria, including 117,000 Turkish nationals.

More than 100 report sexual misconduct by late Ohio State doctor

Reuters | Washington

More than 100 former students have told investigators they were victims of sexual misconduct by a now-deceased Ohio State University doctor employed by its athletic department and medical staff for nearly two decades, the university said on Friday.

New details about the investigation of the late Dr. Richard Strauss were made public days after five former varsity wrestlers sued Ohio State over allegations Strauss had sexually abused them and others and that the university was complicit in failing to take action against him.

Hundreds protest over HK move to ban party

Reuters | Hong Kong

Hundreds of Hong Kong pro-democracy protesters yesterday rallied against the government's attempt to ban a political party, saying it dealt the most serious threat to the city's freedom of association since its return to Chinese rule.

Organisers said 1,200 protested, while the police estimated 600 attended at the peak.

Macron security aide scandal deepens

Paris, France

The most damaging scandal of Emmanuel Macron's presidency deepened yesterday with his interior minister due to face a grilling in parliament over his response to a top security aide of Macron caught on video beating up a young man at a Paris protest in May.

Opposition lawmakers have demanded that Macron, who has so far remained silent about the incident, explain the government's stand after the videos of his aide Alexandre Benalla emerged this week.

They believed they were safe!

After 15 years, thieves behind French heist surface in Serbia

● These criminals are thought to have carried out at least 380 armed robberies

● Identified following an investigation into blood on one of the glass cabinets

AFP | Uzice, Serbia



The so-called Pink Panthers, an international network of jewel thieves, stole valuables worth 334 million euros between 1999-2015, Interpol says

They believed they were safe but a few blood drops betrayed them: 15 years after a daring robbery at a French jewellery store, the four alleged perpetrators have been found -- in Serbia.

The Belfort job had all the hallmarks of a "Pink Panther" operation, the modus operandi used by an international jewel thief network of Serbs and Montenegrins responsible for some of the most audacious robberies of the past two decades.

Between 1999 and 2015, these criminals are thought to have carried out at least 380 armed robberies, targeting high-end jewellery stores and snatching 334 million euros (\$391 million) worth of loot, Interpol says.

One morning in September 2003, a group of masked men burst into a jewellery shop in Belfort, a town in eastern France just 25 kilometres (15 miles) from the Swiss border.

One pulled a handgun, while the others smashed open the glass cases, snatching 350,000 euros worth of jewellery and watches before fleeing -- all within the space of a minute.

Police later managed to arrest their Serbian fences, one of whom had a stolen watch on his wrist.

But the thieves themselves were never caught.

Nor were they identified until 2013 following progress in a forensic investigation into traces of blood on one of the glass cabinets, on a cupboard and on a Cartier box.

By analysing the DNA, they identified two Serb nationals who were unknown in France

but wanted in Austria: "Zica" and "Boka", both of them 41 years old.

And by crosschecking their phone records, they also found the other two suspected of involvement in the robbery: "Sasa", 37, and "Luka", 48.

'Cult of the criminal'

All four come from Uzice, a once prosperous industrial town some 150 kilometres (90 miles) southwest of Belgrade which has since fallen on hard times.

"Most of these criminals originate from Nis, Cacak and Uzice," the town's prosecutor Ljubisa Dragasevic said, explaining that many in this western region end up turning to crime due to problems making ends meet.

But there is also "the cult of the criminal within society, the tough guys", he said.

"In such circles, these activities overseas are a matter of prestige. They... see themselves as defenders of poor Serb victims of the West," the prosecutor said.

Even though they have been identified, the four remain out of reach for the French justice system because Serbia does not extradite its citizens.

Over the past decade, France and Serbia developed close judicial ties following the 2009 murder of a French football fan in Belgrade, prompting a French judge to demand that the four be summoned to a hearing before a

Serbia prosecutor.

Funding a luxury lifestyle

At the hearing in November, all four denied involvement in the robbery.

If they were in Belfort at the time, they were there for "techno music parties", one claimed. Another said they were there "to buy second-hand cars".

Boka had just been jailed over a fatal car accident, while shortly after the November hearing, Zica and Sasa began serving five years for stealing watches worth almost 950,000 euros from a Hamburg jeweller in 2014.

Several of them are also suspected of involvement in robberies in Switzerland and The Netherlands.

Such audacious robberies fund a lavish lifestyle back home, Dragasevic says, explaining that their takings are quickly spent "in bars and restaurants, taking

cocaine, paying for prostitutes... buying luxury cars and expensive clothes" and often at expensive tourist sites.

Statute of limitations expiring

Their activities are not just limited to hitting jewellery stores, with one Serb investigator saying they also link up with Albanian gangs to smuggle drugs to the West. The money is also used for loansharking, financing younger criminals, or investing in property, bars and restaurants, he said.

One pulled a handgun, while the others smashed open the glass cases, snatching 350,000 euros worth of jewellery and watches before fleeing -- all within the space of a minute.

But they never stage robberies on home territory, their "refuge".

With extradition out of the question, if France wants a trial to be held in Serbia over Belfort, as happened with the Hamburg heist, the justice system will need to transfer the case to Belgrade.

If found guilty, the perpetrators could face up to 15 years behind bars.

Otherwise, French prosecutors will have to fall back on a conviction in absentia and the issuing of an international arrest warrant -- which would mean the four thieves could no longer leave Serbia without risking arrest and extradition.



Trump lashes ex-lawyer, says taping of client 'perhaps illegal'

● Former Playboy model Karen McDougal claims she had a months-long affair with Trump after they met in 2006

AFP | Washington, United States

Donald Trump yesterday said his ex-lawyer Michael Cohen may have acted illegally after it emerged he had secretly taped a discussion about payments to a former Playboy model who claims she had an affair with the US president.

In his first direction reaction to a report broken by the New York Times a day earlier, Trump added: "The good news is that your favourite President did



US President Donald Trump and Playboy model Karen McDougal

nothing wrong!"

The Times reported the FBI had seized the recording

during a raid on Cohen's office earlier this year, quoting lawyers and others familiar

with the recording. Cohen has not yet been arrested or charged.

"Inconceivable that the government would break into a lawyer's office (early in the morning) - almost unheard of," Trump tweeted.

"Even more inconceivable that a lawyer would tape a client - totally unheard of & perhaps illegal."

Former Playboy model Karen McDougal claims she had a months-long affair with Trump after they met in 2006, shortly after Trump's wife Melania gave birth to their son Barron. She told CNN previously that he tried to pay her for sex.

The Wall Street Journal said the September 2016 conversation between Trump and Cohen was about buying the

rights to McDougal's story, which she sold a month earlier to The National Enquirer for \$150,000.

The tabloid ultimately sat on it, preventing it from becoming public. The chairman of its parent company, American Media, is a friend of Trump.

Friday's reports raised questions about why Trump's campaign denied knowledge of the deal between McDougal and American Media when it became public and fanned speculation about how much damage Cohen can inflict on the president.

Trump's current personal attorney, Rudy Giuliani, had confirmed to the Times that the Cohen tape existed, but said it showed the president had done nothing wrong.