

Libya

Response to Information Request Number:	LBY00001.ZNK
Date:	9 December 1999
Subject:	Libya: Questions on business practices and freedom of travel
From:	INS Resource Information Center, Washington, DC
Keywords:	Libya / Qadhafi / Business / International / Travel / Europe / Tunisia / Economic Sanctions /

Query:

- 1) How likely is it that an individual can succeed in international business without involvement in the Qadhafi government?
- 2) Does the Libyan government monitor or limit European travel?
- 3) How easily could an individual with known anti-government views cross the Libyan border into Tunisia?

Response:

According to Dr. Mary-Jane Deeb, Middle East Area Specialist at the African and Middle Eastern Division of the Library of Congress, private business is quite commonplace in Libya, and there is no need to be involved with Colonel Mu'ammar Al-Qadhafi's government, to be a successful businessman. However, because Libya has a state-controlled economy, it would be extremely difficult not to have contacts with the government; almost two-thirds of Libyan citizens work in some government capacity. Nevertheless, having ties with government workers does not mean that an individual is a Qadhafi supporter or has any direct involvement with the Qadhafi government. (Deeb, 01 Dec. 1999)

Furthermore, while Qadhafi's policies have tended to isolate Libya from the west, Libya has had a long and close economic relationship with Europe. "Europe intends to resume trade with Iraq and Libya. Access to their oil, and lucrative markets for manufactured goods and arms, has become an urgent domestic political issue and a strategic imperative for Europe." (Margolis, 12 March 1997) In addition, since the suspension of sanctions, Qadhafi has taken measures to solidify Libya's already cordial relations with the European Union through lucrative new contracts, particularly with Italy and Germany. (Takeyh, 1999)

Although the Resource Information Center has been unable to find information dealing freedom of travel to Europe specifically, a State Department Human Rights Report does discuss travel abroad in general. "The government requires citizens to obtain exit permits for travel abroad and limits their access to hard currency." (State Department, 1999) Dr. Neeb added that crossing the border from Libya into Tunisia is quite common because there is extensive trade between the two countries as well as a strong relationship based on bilateral cooperation and consultation since 1998 (Neeb, 01 Dec. 1999; Arabic News, 23 Oct. 1998)

Conclusion

According to Dr. Neeb, all of the situations outlined in the query are likely, "it is not an improbable story." It is also important to note that in 1994 Libya established the Purge Law. Aimed at fighting corruption, the law has been enforced since June of 1996. "Scores of businessmen, traders and shop owners were arbitrarily arrested on charges of corruption and dealing in foreign goods....The 1994 Purge Law provides for the confiscation of private assets by 'Purification Committees'." (State Department, 1999)

Finally, Dr. Neeb explained that the Purge Law states that violators can be punished or executed. (Neeb, 01 Dec. 1999)

This response was prepared after speaking with a country expert and researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC, including the World Wide Web.

References:

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U.S. Department of State. "Libya," *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1998* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, February 1996).

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