

DECLARATION

Terrorism is a growing threat to our democratic values. Combatting it is a common objective of all European countries, which is instrumental in safeguarding peace and collective security.

We former ministers of various European countries are deeply alarmed over the prospect of the Belgian government freeing Assadollah Assadi, the Iranian diplomat currently serving a 20-year prison sentence for attempting to bomb an international summit.

Assadi, who is one of only 20 people on the EU's terrorist blacklist, was convicted by the Belgian Judiciary for masterminding the attempted bombing of the summit organized by the Iranian dissident movement the "National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI)" in France on June 30, 2018. The summit was attended by tens of thousands of people including hundreds of distinguished international personalities from both sides of the Atlantic. Several signatories of this statement were potential victims of the terrorist plot.

It is very telling that after more than two years of investigation, the Belgian Judiciary definitively handed Assadi the maximum sentence and unequivocally stated that he was acting on behalf of the Iranian state. It was the first time that a diplomat was put on trial for his role in a terror plot in the heart of Europe.

Assadi's release is expected to result from a treaty between Belgium and Iran that allows persons sentenced in the territory of either party to be transferred to the territory of the other party. Article 13 of the treaty states: "Each Party may grant pardon, amnesty or commutation of the sentence in accordance with its Constitution or other laws."

Meanwhile, Iranian authorities have said time and again in public that they do not recognize the decision to convict Assadi by the Belgium court. Tehran's most senior officials, including the foreign minister and the spokesman of the Foreign Ministry, have been demanding Assadi's immediate and unconditional release.

It would be delusional to pretend that Assadi will serve the remainder of his 20-year sentence in Iran, the state responsible for the attempted terrorist bombing. Sending Assadi back to Iran would make a mockery of the rule of law in Europe and foster further impunity for the Iranian government and its officials who are involved in terrorism and crimes against humanity.

This is made more alarming by the fact that Iranian state terror goes hand-in-hand with hostage diplomacy, with the regime using the latter to shield itself from accountability. Whenever Tehran has faced even a feeble challenge to its terrorism, it has arrested innocent Westerners on spurious charges and has exploited their plight as a bargaining chip to gain concessions from Western countries. Iranian media have plainly stated that a number of these individuals will only be freed if Assadi is released.

It is very revealing that Iran has arrested several Swedish, French, and German nationals just in recent months, replenishing its stock of Western hostages. This trend must be ended. To save and secure the lives of their citizens, all democratic countries should adopt a decisive policy and put pressure on Iran to stop this inhumane policy.

Our direct experience shows that releasing Assadi under any pretext would only embolden Tehran's terrorist conduct in Europe, would endanger the safety and security of Europe and European citizens, and would only amplify the impunity that the Iranian regime's officials have unduly enjoyed.

Implementing the Belgian-Iranian treaty and returning Assadi would set a dangerous precedent and seriously weaken the rule of law. It would have a colossal impact on Europe's combat against terrorism and send the message that the Iranian regime can evade responsibility for major international crimes and mass terror in Europe. Belgium would bear a heavy responsibility in this regard.

Recently, in light of a complaint filed by the NCRI and several international dignitaries, the Brussels Court of Appeal issued a temporary ruling blocking Assadi's transfer to Iran. As officials who have long served European nations and their citizens, we urgently call upon the Belgian government to make that block permanent and to rescind its decision regarding the treaty for "Transfer of Sentenced Persons".

At a minimum, Brussels must make it absolutely clear that treaty will not apply to terrorists, and certainly not to the terrorist mastermind Assadollah Assadi. For the sake of the common safety and security of all European nations, he must serve out the entirety of his sentence in Belgium.

Signatories:

Janez Jansa, Former Prime Minister – Slovenia

Iveta Radicova, Former Prime Minister – Slovakia

Petre Roman, Former Prime Minister – Romania

Geir H. Haarde, Former Prime Minister – Iceland

Franz Joseph Jung, Former Federal Minister for Defence – Germany

Theo Francken, MP, Former Secretary of State for Asylum, Migration – Belgium

Ryszard Kalisz, Former Minister of the Interior and Administration – Poland

David Jones, MP, Former Minister of State for Brexit – UK

Alain Vivien, Former Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs – France

Jan-Erik Enestam, Former Minister for Defence – Finland

Horst Teltschik, Close adviser of Chancellor Helmut Kohl – Germany

John Perry, Former Minister for Small Business – Ireland

Marcin Świącicki, Former Minister for Foreign Economic Relations, former Mayor of Warsaw – Poland

Kimmo Sasi, Former Minister for Transport and Communications – Finland

Karel Schwarzenberg, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs – Czech Republic

Francis Zammit Dimech, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs – Malta

Anatol Şalaru, Former Minister of Defence – Moldova

Edvard Solnes, Former Minister for Environment – Iceland

Eduard Lintner, Parliamentary State Secretary in the Federal Ministry of Interior - Germany

Mario Galea, MP, Former Secretary of State for Older Persons and Care – Malta

Giuseppe Morganti, Former State Secretary for Education, Culture and University – San Marino