

Letter of 8 January 2019 from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Stef Blok, and the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, Kajsa Ollongren, to the President of the House of Representatives on sanctions against Iran on the grounds of undesirable interference

On 8 January 2019 the European Union, partly at the recommendation of the Netherlands, imposed sanctions in the context of the EU sanctions lists (Common Position 2001/931/CFSP) on the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and Security and two Iranian nationals. This means that funds and other financial assets of the Ministry and both individuals have been frozen.

On the basis of information gathered by the General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) and foreign intelligence services, the Netherlands considers it probable that Iran had a hand in the preparation or commission of assassinations and attacks on EU territory.

When the sanctions were announced today, the Netherlands, together with the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Denmark and Belgium met with the Iranian authorities to convey their serious concerns regarding Iran's probable involvement in these hostile acts on EU territory. Iran was informed that involvement in such matters is entirely unacceptable and must be stopped immediately. Iran is expected to cooperate fully in removing the present concerns and, where necessary, in aiding criminal investigations. If such cooperation is not forthcoming, further sanctions cannot be ruled out.

The AIVD has strong indications that Iran was involved in the assassinations of two Dutch nationals of Iranian origin, in Almere in 2015 and in The Hague in 2017. These individuals were opponents of the Iranian regime. In the Dutch government's opinion, hostile acts of this kind flagrantly violate the sovereignty of the Netherlands and are unacceptable. When confronted by the Netherlands, Iran denied any involvement in these assassinations.

On the basis of the AIVD's findings, the Netherlands took firm diplomatic measures in June 2018. The Iranian ambassador was summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and two members of the Iranian embassy's staff were expelled. These diplomats were not expelled because of any confirmed involvement in committing or directing the assassinations, but as a clear signal that the Netherlands regards Iran's probable involvement in these serious cases as unacceptable.¹

Following these developments, the Netherlands, together with other European countries affected by Iranian interference – including a thwarted bomb attack in Paris and a thwarted assassination in Denmark in 2018 – has now taken further measures against Iran with the aim of halting these Iranian activities.

In the interests of facilitating this common EU action, confidentiality was required. This is why the government decided not to disclose sooner the reason for expelling the two Iranian diplomats.

Criminal investigations into the above assassinations are under way in the Netherlands. The appraisal of evidence in the context of the criminal justice system differs from the appraisal of intelligence obtained by the intelligence services. So far, the ongoing criminal investigations have not confirmed, in a criminal law sense, the intelligence that suggests interference by Iran.

It was emphasised at the meeting in Tehran that these measures are not linked to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), known commonly as the Iran nuclear deal. As long as Iran

¹ See also the letter to parliament on Undesirable Foreign Interference of March 2018, Parliamentary Papers, House of Representatives 2017/18, 30 821, no. 42.

fulfils its obligations under the deal, the European Union will do the same. Nevertheless, Iran will be held to account for matters that affect EU and international security interests, as is the case with the acts described above, as well as with respect to its ballistic missile programme and the country's role in the region.