

**Question for oral answer O-000007/2023**

**to the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy**

Rule 136

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Subject: Call for a European strategy to counter hostage diplomacy

A number of European citizens are being held hostage by Iran and other regimes and are being used as bargaining chips. These citizens are being arbitrarily detained on false charges and some have received sentences of many years in prison, dozens of lashes or even death.

The most recent case in Iran involves the Belgian national Olivier Vandecasteele. He joins a growing list of such detainees, which also features France's Cécile Kohler and Jacques Paris, Sweden's Ahmadreza Djalali and dozens of other EU citizens. Since 2010, at least 66 foreign nationals or Iranian dual nationals have been detained by the Iranian regime<sup>1</sup>. A prime example is Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, who was only released after the British Government paid hundreds of millions of euro in exchange<sup>2</sup>.

The European Parliament resolution of 19 January 2023 on the executions and protests in Iran strongly condemned this phenomenon and called for the immediate release of Vandecasteele and other detainees<sup>3</sup>.

However, the Member States alone often do not have enough leverage to combat the horrific violations of the rights of EU citizens, as they find themselves obliged to pay large sums of money or exchange convicted terrorists for their citizens<sup>4</sup>.

Therefore, we call for a European strategy to counter hostage diplomacy, including a specialised task force that can effectively deal with EU citizens being held hostage by Iran and other regimes. Iran and other regimes using hostage diplomacy can only be stopped through cooperation at EU level; we can only protect our citizens if we work together. Consequently:

1. What can the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR) do to protect EU citizens from hostile foreign regimes?
2. Will the VP/HR implement a coordinated strategy to counter hostage diplomacy?
3. Does the VP/HR agree that a coordinated EU approach is required in order to adopt a firmer stance against these regimes?

Submitted: 27.2.2023

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<sup>1</sup> <https://repository.essex.ac.uk/32304/>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2022-03-16/the-bill-for-nazanin-zaghari-ratcliffe-s-freedom-about-530-million>.

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0016\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0016_EN.html).

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.brusselstimes.com/248574/vub-professor-djalali-might-be-exchanged-for-iranian-terrorist-convicted-in-belgium>.

Lapses: 28.5.2023