

October 18, 2021

Mr. Giovanni di Lorenzo
Editor,
Die Zeit
Buceriusstraße, Eingang Speersort 1
20095 Hamburg

Dear Mr. Di Lorenzo,

As the President of the International Committee in Search of Justice (ISJ), and former Vice President of the European Parliament, I write to share with you an issue of urgent and grave concern regarding an apparent, albeit peculiar, inquiry made by an individual, Luisa Hommerich, who has introduced herself as a reporter for Die Zeit.

In an email sent at 8:00 pm, on October 14, 2021, to the Representative Office of the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NWRI), she has posed 30 rather slanted questions and demanded a reply by 6:00 pm, Monday, October 18.

This correspondence, which reminds one of an ultimatum, rather than an innocuous journalistic inquiry, raises several disconcerting issues.

1. Ms. Hommerich is not what one could describe as a typical journalist. She studied in Iran in 2016 and 2017 and also spent some time in Tehran in January 2018. Not surprisingly, she pursued an almost identical approach, as a “reporter” for Der Spiegel back in 2018, and even showed up uninvited at the gates of Ashraf-3, a mini-city, which is home to members of the main Iranian opposition group, the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK).
2. Now, as was the case in 2018, when she approached the NCRI in 2018, she has posed eerily similar questions and despite receiving hundreds of pages of documents, which refuted every single one of the unfounded allegations, dressed up as questions, failed to mention any of them. On February 16, 2019, the German publication Der Spiegel released an article on internal relations in Ashraf 3, alleging "restrictions" and "torture" within the MEK. The article she wrote was quickly reprinted in major Iranian state-run media, including by one website, even before it had published in Der Spiegel, leaving little doubt that Iranian intelligence services knew in advance and perhaps orchestrated the whole project. Among the allegations contained in the said article was that the MEK practice “slitting throats three time a week at Ashraf-3.”
3. On March 21, 2019, a [Hamburg court](#) ordered Spiegel to remove these allegations from the article. If it failed to do so, the court ordered it to pay a fine of 250,000 euros or endure six months of imprisonment. Der Spiegel never challenged the court's ruling, and quickly

deleted libelous parts of the article because it knew it would face more serious defeats in the face of a challenge.

4. Another newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung also made similar these accusations in an article published on its website on May 13, 2020. The Hamburg court on June 24, 2020, ordered the newspaper to delete and avoid repeating three of the accusations against the MEK and its members in Albania. That paper implemented the order and removed the relevant parts from its original story. Still, Frankfurter Allgemeine appealed the case, but the original order was reaffirmed by the court, which also ordered Frankfurter Allgemeine to pay all associated legal costs.
5. In both the Der Spiegel and Frankfurter Allgemeine instances, as well as all similar media stories, the bulk of the accusations are based on lies manufactured by agents of the Ministry of Intelligence, who identify themselves as “former members” of the MEK. One of these individuals, [Hadi Sani Khani](#), who had collaborated with the Ministry of Intelligence for four years in Albania by demonizing the MEK, wrote an open letter to the UN Secretary-General on February 14, 2021, revealing some of the Ministry of Intelligence’s tactics in this regard. He wrote that after transferring to Albania from Iraq in September 2016, “Two months later in November 2016, because I could not continue the struggle, I decided to quit the ranks of the PMOI and went the office of the UN Refugee Agency in Tirana. Two weeks later, I went to the Iranian embassy in Tirana. For four years I fell into a trap set by the Iranian regime’s Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) and its Iranian embassy in Albania. During this period, I began to collaborate with official agents of the MOIS in the Embassy in Albania, such as Fereidoun Zandi Ali-Abadi and notorious MOIS agents, including Ebrahim and Massoud Khodabandeh, Gholamreza Shekari and Ehsan Bidi and later Hassan Heyrani. They used me in demonization, espionage, intelligence gathering, and reconnoitring schemes to carry out terrorist actions against the PMOI.”
6. Sani Khani also revealed how the Ministry of Intelligence mobilizes and controls a network of these agents to write articles and plant lies and falsehoods on a monthly basis in various websites affiliated with the Ministry of Intelligence, using bylines such as former members of the MEK. “These people received 500 euros a month from the embassy. According to the embassy's orders, these mercenaries are required to create at least one account on Facebook and Instagram, and to produce and publish 12 articles against the PMOI every month, and to continuously relay and republish topics and content identified by the embassy or the Ministry of Intelligence.” They also engaged in an extensive campaign to send CDs containing demonization material against the MEK to media contacts and parliamentarians in various countries, according to Sani Khani. He added: “The topics that the embassy and the ministry sent to (these agents for interviews with intelligence services-affiliated outlets), or topics for writing articles on the websites of the Ministry of Intelligence, included the following: torture of dissidents, lack of freedom in PMOI relations, brainwashing, confessions about sexual topics and thoughts, cutting ties with the outside world, forced divorces, suspected killings within the PMOI, killing of Kurds and Shiites in Iraq, getting money from the United States, Israel and Saudi Arabia, and the idea that they took their nuclear information from Israel and have no base or popular support in Iran.”
7. With respect to the particular Der Spiegel article mentioned above, Sani Khani mentioned Ms. Hommerich in particular. “In September 2018, we were informed by the embassy that a

reporter from the German paper Der Spiegel is set to visit Albania and we were asked to be prepared to meet with the reporter for interviews. The reporter was a 30-year-old woman named Louisa Hommerich. I later found out that she studied Islamic studies in Tehran university in 2016 and 2017 and had contacts with the paramilitary Basij members as well. Together with a group of other agents who had previously defected from the PMOI, we met her in a restaurant in Ramsa district in Zagozi square. Each of us then told her lies about the PMOI which we had been given in preparation of the meeting. I was in contact with this reporter for the next three months. Occasionally she asked me questions about the PMOI which I then raised with the embassy and provided her the response I received.”

8. The 30 so-called questions are not really questions, both in form and substance. The reader of the questions comes away with a sense that Mr. Hommerich has already reach out her conclusions and has emailed the questions, as if going through the motions, to make it appear as though she had indeed sought answers to them. As for substance, most of these allegations date back to more than three decades ago, and many are posed on false and baseless assumptions.
9. I, many of my European and American colleagues, including the late Sir David Amess (murdered on Friday), have known the NCRI and the MEK for more than three decades. As such, we are quite familiar with the massive and expensive demonization campaign organized by the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS), against the MEK. The regime in Tehran does even hide the fact that it employs journalists and so-called academics to advance its propaganda and vilification and terrorist objectives. [Ali Fallahian](#), a former Minister of Intelligence of Iran, had said in a televised interview on July 17, 2017, “For intelligence gathering both inside and outside the country, the Ministry of Intelligence needs a cover. The Ministry does not dispatch an intelligence officer, let’s say to Germany, the United States or Russia, and declare 'I am from the Ministry of Intelligence, please provide your information to me.' (They would do it) under the cover of business or media jobs.”
10. I headed a delegation of European Parliament and lawmakers from other European countries on several trips to Camp Ashraf, Iraq, where the members of the MEK resided until 2016, and before being relocated to Albania. We had the opportunity to meet thousands of MEK members, men and women, and speak with them freely. At the end of one of our trip, a committee I headed while still at the European Parliament, The Friends of a Free Iran, published a detailed report, which addressed many of the allegations raised by Ms. Hommerich in her October 14 letter. That report, along with hundreds of other documents, was provided to Ms. Hommerich and Der Spiegel editors back in 2018. Unfortunately, they chose to ignore all those documents.
11. On April 8, 2016, German federal prosecutors arrested a man named [Meysam Panahi](#), who under the cover of a former member of the MEK was spying and gathering intelligence for the mullahs' regime with respect to the MEK and the National Council of Resistance of Iran. He was subsequently sentenced in July 2016 to two years and four months in prison and to pay all court costs. During the trial, it was determined that this individual, under the guidance of a senior officer of the Ministry of Intelligence named Sajjad in Tehran, was collecting

information about the MEK in different countries on a daily basis and passed on this information to Sajjad.

12. On October 23, 2019, at a press conference, the [Albanian police chief](#) announced the discovery of a terrorist network in Albania run by the clerical regime, which sought to carry out attacks on the Iranian opposition movement MEK. The police chief said an Iranian regime's Quds Force operative named "Peyman" organized and directed the attack from inside Iran. He added that Alireza Naghashzadeh, an agent of Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS), born in 1974 in Iran, was involved in this terrorist operation. Naghashzadeh carries an Austrian passport issued to Irwin Aram, and purportedly identifies himself as a "former member" of the MEK.
13. In his revealing letter, Sani Khani also mentions the role of two regime mercenaries in the UK, Massoud Khodabandeh and his wife Ann Singleton. They played a key role in briefing and sending reporters to Albania to interview the regime's agents, and they used local agents in this regard. A report prepared by the US Library of Congress Federal Research Division on the Iranian regime's Ministry of Intelligence [stated in December 2012](#) that this couple had been working for the Ministry of Intelligence for years. The couple published the book "Saddam's Private Army" and rehashed the same lies that appear in the Neighborhood Guard. By doing so, they prepared the groundwork for their bombing of the MEK by Coalition Forces. This led to the killing of dozens of MEK members and the wounding of many others.
14. It goes without saying that using the so-called former members of the MEK is a discredited and threadbare tactic employed by the MOIS to smear the MEK and the NCRI. Intelligence Services in Europe, including BfV in Germany and AIVD in the Netherlands, have addressed this issue in their annual reports. Mr. Sani Khani's letters speaks volumes about this fact.
15. As recently as in 2004, the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV), wrote: "The VEVAK (Persian acronym for the MOIS) is particularly interested in the ... People's Mujahidin of Iran (Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, MEK) ...and in its political arm, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI). For its spying activities, the Iranian intelligence service relies on a network of secret agents who are recruited from among the supporters of the organizations and groups under VEVAK surveillance. In most cases, recruitment pitches are made when target persons are on a visit to Iran. During such approaches, the service puts pressure on the targeted persons, e.g. by threatening them with reprisals on their relatives living in Iran. Persons who do not travel to Iran are contacted over the telephone from Iran."
16. In its 2011 annual report, The Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service wrote, Teheran's efforts to undermine the opposition People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (Mujahedin-e Khalq, MEK) in the Netherlands continued unabated in 2011. In a campaign coordinated and financed by the Iranian intelligence services, the media and a number of politicians and other public servants were approached with a view to portraying the MEK in a highly negative light.

In light of the above, I personally request that you look into this matter and take appropriate step to prevent the Iranian regime, which is universally viewed as a pariah state to take advantage of Die

Zeit and disseminate its oft-repeated propaganda. If that were to happen, the outcome would seriously and irreparably damage the reputation of your publication.

Kind regards,
ISJ President
Alejo Vidal Quadras