

## The women of Iran deserve a tough EU line — and Mahsa Amini the Sakharov Prize



By David Lega, Member of the European Parliament

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**Mahsa Amini's example continues to challenge us, in Sweden, in Europe and beyond to dare to tell the truth and stand up for what is right, which is why I nominated her for this year's Sakharov Prize, MEP David Lega writes.**

One year ago Jina Mahsa Amini dared to defy the Iranian regime by showing her hair in public. For this they murdered her.

But she was not so easily disappeared, and her death was not mourned in silence. The world remains captivated and inspired by her courage.

The mass protests which followed Mahsa Amini's murder showed not only the brutality but insecurity of a regime born in violence and marked, ever since, by an embrace of repression and regional unrest.

A regime which uses its morality police to enforce political submission at home. Which supports Hezbollah, Hamas and other terrorist organizations abroad.

Which seeks "death to Israel", stakes its future on the Chinese Communist Party and aligns itself with Vladimir Putin, Kim Jong-Un, Bashar al-Assad and Nicolás Maduro.

And which now sends its death machines to Russia for the indiscriminate killing of Ukrainians.

### **Iranians are the ones who have suffered the most**

To combat the atrocities sponsored by this regime is why, last autumn, our KD party and I were the first in the Riksdag and in the European Parliament to push for calling a spade a spade and finally labelling the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) a terrorist organization.

It's why, in January, I championed the European Parliament's resolution stating the clear fact that the terrible human rights abuses being carried out in Iran put at risk ongoing efforts to revive the nuclear agreement with the EU and EU partners — and why I then voted to suspend these talks.

We can never accept the Iranian regime's ability to wield a nuclear weapon; but nor has that regime earned the sanctions relief a nuclear deal would inevitably bring.

We have seen recurring mass protests: against oppression, corruption and poor governance — and in response, recurring crackdowns.



*Iranians protests the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini after she was detained by the morality police in Tehran, October 2022AP Photo*

It is of course Iranians who have suffered the most. Those in Iran who tell the truth about this, who push back, risk imprisonment and worse.

We have seen recurring mass protests: against oppression, corruption and poor governance — and in response, recurring crackdowns.

- [Activists in Europe mark the anniversary of Mahsa Amini's death in police custody in Iran](#)
- [The West turned its gaze away from Iran, but the regime's cruelties are far from over](#)

Last year, more than 500 protesters inspired by Mahsa Amini were killed. Her uncle and father have been inexplicably detained. The regime is frightened more people will take to the streets.

#### **This is why I nominated Mahsa Amini for the Sakharov Prize**

"Women, Life, and Freedom": this was the message inspired by Mahsa Amini. It is a universal message of dignity and opportunity, fullness and fairness — for women everywhere, and indeed for all people: since to silence and immature women is to stagnate, and ultimately die, as a society.

And yet it is a message of hope Iran's sclerotic leadership simply cannot abide, much less deliver.

**Mahsa Amini's example continues to challenge us, in Sweden, in Europe and beyond: to dare to tell the truth, stand up for what is right — and keep alive, always, our hope and drive for a better tomorrow.**

Mahsa Amini's example continues to challenge us, in Sweden, in Europe and beyond: to dare to tell the truth, stand up for what is right — and keep alive, always, our hope and drive for a better tomorrow. To fight injustice.



*A woman with her face painted in memory of Mahsa Amini in Al Rayyan, Qatar, November 2022* AP Photo/Frank Augstein

It's why I nominated her — in our Swedish press and in the European People's Party (EPP), the Christian Democratic group in the European Parliament — for the European Parliament's 2023 Sakharov Prize, an honour given to an extraordinary defender of human dignity and human rights.

- [MEPs award Ukraine's 'brave people' and President Zelenskyy with top human rights prize](#)
- [Belarus opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya awarded EU's Sakharov Prize](#)

It's why I called for a debate in last week's plenary session, to commemorate Mahsa Amini at the one-year mark of her murder — and why I am so determined now, following our EPP Group's official endorsement, to carry her nomination forward to the entire European Parliament: to show our active and ongoing support for "Women, Life and Freedom" in Iran.

#### **Engaging with Tehran means betraying all those still fighting for freedom**

And it's why, finally, I believe neither my country of Sweden nor the EU should engage the Iranian regime further on any outstanding issues, including revived nuclear talks — until all European citizens unjustly detained in Iran are returned safely home.

Why should the brutal treatment and even execution of innocent victims be rewarded with face time or face-saving measures?

This would betray the cause of Mahsa Amini and all those women and men still fighting for life and freedom.

**The spark of Mahsa Amini's vision for a better future, fanned by her extraordinary courage, continues to burn bright.**





*People attend a protest rally in Hamburg to mark the first anniversary of the death of Mahsa Amini, September 2023* Jonas Walzberg/dpa via AP Photo

Unfortunately, we have seen the Belgian government — and now (again), it seems, the US administration — making prisoner swaps.

Of course, I welcome, and celebrate together with their families, the safe return of all those held hostage in Iran.

- [Americans fly out of Iran after \\$6 billion prisoner swap deal with US](#)
- [NGO worker Olivier Vandecasteele freed from imprisonment in Iran and 'on his way' to Belgium](#)

But will such ad hoc exchanges, sometimes bought at great cost, protect our citizens in the long run? Will they deter more malign actions on the part of the regime? Even more fundamentally, what has happened to the principle "no negotiations with terrorists"?

I believe such deals are the wrong approach, for I fear they only encourage more hostage-taking down the road.

#### **A tough, united stance to keep the authoritarian regime in check**

The EU should rather use all the tools we have to pressure the Iranian regime to change: by labelling the IRGC as terrorists, by raising the costs of human rights abuses with more EU sanctions — and by refusing to return to the table until all wrongly held EU citizens are freed.

More than this, we in the European Union need a tough, coordinated, united stance vis-a-vis Iran together with the United States, United Kingdom and all our global partners. The bad behaviour of this authoritarian regime must be checked.

The struggle for women, for life and for freedom continues in Iran and around the world. The spark of Mahsa Amini's vision for a better future, fanned by her extraordinary courage, continues to burn bright. Let's honour her memory and the memory of all those who have suffered so much in taking up her cause. Let's dare to follow her lead.

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