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Analysis of today
Assessment of tomorrow

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How Russia is affected by the designation of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist organisation

Designating the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist organisation would be an unusually strong show of the European Union's muscles to Tehran. The Union is getting closer to reaching such a decision, which would put the regime in Tehran under even stronger pressure from the West.

The rapid movement of the Europeans towards the decision to declare the IRGC as a terrorist organisation, as the "heart" of Iran's repression, is certainly a consequence of the unabated cruelty towards the civilian protesters that has been ongoing since last September. But it also seems like a move which makes it clear to Tehran that Europe considers it an important Russian ally in its aggression against Ukraine.

The EU has long been the most persistent party in attempts to revive the 2015 agreement between the West and Iran on its nuclear programme (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action - JCPOA), particularly after Donald Trump's 2018 decision for the US to withdraw from the agreement.

Although without great expectations, the chief European diplomat, Josep Borrell, spoke to the head of Iranian diplomacy, Hossein Amirabdollahian, last December in Jordan about the chances of reactivating the nuclear agreement.

There has been no progress, apart from the insistence that the "lines of communication" should be maintained. Now, less than a month later, it is clear that the attempt to revive the nuclear deal was also unsuccessful, and would possibly be the last one.

Synchronised pressure from the West

Last week, the Netherlands was added to the fairly wide list of EU member states asking for the IRGC to be designated a terrorist organisation. Its ten ruling majority parliamentary parties asked the EU to make this decision.

So far, there have been such requests from 100 members of the European Parliament, from the Czech Republic and from Germany, whose head of diplomacy Annalena Baerbock tweeted, "We have taken the initiative with EU partners to make new listings at the next external council. That's not enough for us: Listing the Revolutionary Guard as a terrorist organisation is politically important and makes sense."

Listing the IRGC as a terrorist organisation by the EU is no longer a political issue, but a matter of legal technique. Le Monde reported that the initiators of the decision sought advice from the European Council's lawyers on how to prepare a strong decision which could not be overturned by the European Court of Justice.The moves of the Western allies have been synchronised on this issue. The expected EU decision coincides with an identical initiative in the UK.

The most convincing step in this direction took place last May, when US President Joe Biden confirmed that he did not intend to remove the IRGC from the list of terrorist organisations, where it was placed by his predecessor Trump in 2019.

No chance of renewing Iranian programme agreement

Iran will not get concessions on reactivating the nuclear deal from the West. This was primarily influenced by the unabated repression of civil protests in Iran, arrests and the killings of activists, with the IRGC being the main instrument of that repression.

The European acceleration in punishing Iran is linked to the overall attitude of the West towards the Russian aggression against Ukraine. If the IRGC joins about 20 other organisations that the EU considers terrorist, it will also be a sanction due to Iran's military support for the Russian invasion.

This "Russian" aspect is perhaps even more important for the decision of the Europeans

and is somewhat confirmed by Josep Borrell's statement after the December talks with Hossein Amirabdollahian. At that time, he insisted that Iran stop cooperating with Russia before the demand for an end to the repression of activists in Iran.

The chances of reviving the agreement on the Iranian nuclear programme are rapidly moving towards zero, and with the EU listing the IRGC as a terrorist organisation, it will reach that point.
On the other hand, the joint action of the West in this direction will mean a rather strong response to the creation of the Russian-Iranian alliance, which during the aggression against Ukraine is increasingly profiled as military, not only economic and political.
By placing the IRGC on the "blacklist", the Russian invasion of Ukraine will acquire another, albeit indirect, characteristic of being "coloured" with terrorism. In this sense, the Kremlin's expectations of being accepted as an adequate interlocutor in some future peace negotiations regarding Ukraine are seriously decreasing.

After the US initiatives for Iran to be declared a state sponsor of terrorism and several such decisions of the EU member states and the European Parliament, the Kremlin will be burdened by more terrorist baggage owing to its military ties with the regime in Tehran, and there will be even fewer people prepared to negotiate with terrorists about peace in Ukraine.