

Paris, 15 July 2019

Detention of a French academic in Iran

Fariba Adelkhah, Director of Research at the Centre of Study of International Relations Centre CERI-SciencesPo Paris, founding member of the European Network of Analysis of Political Societies (REASOPO), has been arrested in Iran, most probably on the 5th of June. Her colleagues only became aware of her arrest on the 25th, when the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the French Embassy in Tehran were also informed.

As we express our solidarity with our colleague, we wish to thank and express our gratitude to the French diplomats and political officials involved for their discreet but determined actions. In agreement with them, we remained silent in order not to jeopardise their endeavours and further the « strategy of tension » that was apparently adopted by the authors of Fariba Adelkhah's arrest, who probably wanted to use her detention as part of the power struggle which sets Tehran against Washington and the mediation efforts which France has initiated between the two parties. This is in any case a hypothesis to consider, because nothing justifies the incarceration of our colleague. Her activities are strictly academic, she has no link whatsoever with any intelligence agency, and she engages in no political activity in Iran. She was arrested either to be used as a bargaining chip or because academic freedom and research have become intolerable for the security operatives in Iran, or at least some of them. Any allegation regarding her involvement in operations of espionage or regime destabilisation have no credibility whatsoever, and would make anyone familiar with her personal or professional trajectory laugh – were this not about her freedom and her health...

The disclosure, on social and traditional media, of the news of her detention leads us to do two things. On the one hand, we wish to reiterate our faith in the actions taken by the French authorities to obtain her liberation. On the other, we wish to provide more

information for the numerous people around the world who have already expressed their solidarity and outrage.

Fariba Adelkhah is an anthropologist. She is the author of several articles and books that have profoundly changed our understanding of Iranian society, particularly *La Révolution sous le voile. Femmes islamiques d'Iran* (Karthala, 1991), *Being Modern in Iran*, (Hurst, 1999 and Columbia University Press, 2001), as well as *The Thousand and One Borders of Iran* (Routledge, 2016). She came to study in France in 1977, and settled in Paris for personal reasons, but she continued doing fieldwork in Iran through long-term research stays, which led to her being subjected to various forms of intimidation (questioning, confiscation of her passport) on several occasions. This did not deter her, however, from carrying out her work as a researcher which she saw as a right, but also a duty to her country of origin. The arrest of the French PhD candidate Clotilde Reiss, in 2009, which she commented on in the press in a way that now seems prophetic https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/monde/proche-moyen-orient/en-iran-le-chercheur-est-considere-comme-un-agent-007_780861.html

led her to publish an open letter in Persian to the President of the Islamic Republic, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, translated into French by the newspaper *Courrier international* <https://www.courrierinternational.com/article/2009/09/10/contre-le-regime-de-la-peur-en-iran>

Reading this today sends a shiver down the spine...

Fariba Adelkhah then left the study of Iran for a new focus on Afghanistan, on her usual terms: intense field research carried in difficult and dangerous situations. She produced several *Etudes du Ceri*, available on line: <http://www.sciencespo.fr/ceri/fr/papier/etude> and several special issues of academic journals, articles and book chapters.

After Hassan Rohani's election as President, she went back to studying Iran, settling in Qom, taking *fiqh* lessons and devoting herself to the analysis of the Shiite clerical institution, more specifically the religious interface between Iran, Afghanistan and Iraq, developing themes explored in her book *The Thousand and One Borders of Iran*.

What is less well known is that Fariba Adelkhah has also established herself on the Iranian literary stage in the last few years, under a *nom de plume*, through the quality of

her translations into Persian of French mystical poems from the end of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

Fariba Adelkhah is a researcher who is unanimously respected, both for the quality of her publications and for her personal integrity. Her arrest is absurd and outrageous. The European Network for the Analysis of Political Societies wishes to add its voice to the outpouring of feeling which has been forthcoming from the international scientific community since her detention was disclosed at the end of last week, and demands her liberation.

Noting the disdain for academic freedom shown by the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the danger that academics face when going to Iran, REASOPO asks European scientific and academic institutions to immediately suspend all forms of cooperation with Iran with the exception of the reception of students coming from Iran, while expressing its solidarity with the Iranian colleagues confronted with the arbitrariness of the security apparatus of the Islamic Republic.