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## EU calls on Iran to free British embassy worker

Europe has joined in condemnation of the jail sentence handed down to Hossein Rassam, a British embassy worker accused of fomenting violence in protests after the disputed election in Iran.

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By Richard Spencer in Dubai

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The European Union presidency issued a statement expressing its "deep concern" over the four-year term given at a closed court hearing to Hossein Rassam, chief local research analyst for the political section of the embassy.

The EU statement said: "The EU considers the sentence unjustified and harsh, and urges the Iranian authorities to overturn it swiftly."



Hossein Rassam was among more than a dozen defendants detained during protests over President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's disputed June 12 re-election in court in Tehran Photo: GETTY

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"The presidency reiterates that any action against one EU country, a citizen or member of embassy staff, is considered an action against the entire EU, and will be treated accordingly."

The issue was raised by David Miliband, the foreign secretary, at a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Brussels.

"This will be seen as an attack against the entire diplomatic community in Iran and important principles are at stake," Mr Miliband said.

Earlier, the Iranian ambassador had been called in to the Foreign Office to be told of British anger in person. Mr Miliband is trying to persuade all his EU counterparts to follow suit as an act of solidarity.

Embassy officials have had no contact with Mr Rassam since he was put on trial, out of fear that visits would increase

Iranian suspicions of his role. They were informed by friends of the sentence.

There has been no official confirmation. "The court has issued a verdict," an Iranian news agency quoted his lawyer, Abdolsamad Khorramshahi, as saying. "But I as a lawyer of Rassam have not received the verdict yet.

Therefore I can't give any comment."

Diplomats say they hope that Mr Rassam will appeal but hold out little hope that charges can now be dropped. The most optimistic outcome is that, as with the case of Roxana Saberi, an Iranian-American journalist accused of spying earlier this year, the sentence will be reduced sufficiently to allow him to walk free.

Mr Rassam was one of nine embassy workers detained after the string of protests that met the re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in June.

Opponents said the polls had been rigged, triggering a mass outpouring on to the streets of Tehran.

The other employees were later released, but Mr Rassam was last seen at a televised show trial alongside a French embassy worker and a French lecturer.

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