

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 21, 2020

Ambassador Tihomir Stoytchev
Embassy of the Republic of Bulgaria to the United States
1621 22nd Street, NW, Dimitar Peshev Plaza
Washington, D.C. 20008

Dear Ambassador Stoytchev,

We write to you with deep appreciation for your work to strengthen the bilateral relationship between the United States and Bulgaria.

We were pleased to see Bulgaria's September 21 sentencing in absentia of two Hezbollah-backed operatives, Meliad Farah and Hassan El Hajj Hassan, to life in prison for their participation in the deadly 2012 Burgas bus bombing. The attack killed the Bulgarian driver and five Israeli tourists and left dozens of Bulgarians and Israelis injured.

While the verdict is encouraging, Bulgaria now has the opportunity to take another step towards justice by designating Hezbollah as a terrorist organization in its entirety. Your government's investigation has already established that Hezbollah provided logistical and financial backing for the Burgas attack. In addition to its direct culpability for a terrorist attack on Bulgarian soil, Hezbollah's international terrorist activity is well documented and ongoing. The Burgas attack occurred on the anniversary of Hezbollah's 1994 bombing of the AMIA Jewish community center in Argentina, which killed 85 people. In 2015, authorities seized tons of ammonium nitrate, suspected for use in future attacks, from Hezbollah operatives in the United Kingdom and Cyprus. German officials recently confirmed a similar seizure in Germany.

The time is right for concrete actions from our European allies to hold Hezbollah accountable. The Burgas attacks convinced the European Union in 2013 to designate the so-called "military wing" of Hezbollah, but not its "political wing," as a terrorist organization. Hezbollah's political leadership does not itself recognize this division. In designating Hezbollah as a terrorist group, Bulgaria would reject this false distinction and set a bold example for the rest of the European Union to follow.

We ask that Bulgaria quickly take up this matter. Bulgaria's Council of Ministers possesses the mechanisms to sanction and designate Hezbollah by adding it to a list subject to the Measures Against the Financing of Terrorism Act. While your government added Farah and Hassan to this list in 2016, it has yet to list Hezbollah itself.

We also urge your government to work with Interpol and international partners to apprehend Farah and Hassan, who remain at large, so that these convicted individuals may serve their sentences and the victims' families may attempt to collect the awarded compensation.

Hezbollah remains a clear and present danger to Europe and the United States. The verdict in the Burgas case is an important first step, but if our countries are to truly hold Hezbollah accountable for its crimes and thwart future terrorist attacks in Bulgaria and throughout Europe, further action against Hezbollah by Bulgaria and other European Union countries is necessary.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,



Tom Cotton
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator