

Meet the New Iranian President of the Norwegian Parliament



In Norway, the king is head of state, and the prime minister is head of government. But there's a third individual who, under law, is ranked in the official hierarchy ahead of any political figure and just after the sovereign himself. That person is the president of Stortinget, Norway's Parliament.

As a result of the national elections on September 13, the so-called conservative coalition under Erna Solberg that had governed since 2013 was replaced by a center-left coalition under the new prime minister, Jonas Gahr Støre. Eva Kristin Hansen, a Labor Party Member of Parliament from the northern county of Sør-Trøndelag, was named president of Parliament.

Barely weeks after her installation, Hansen was at the center of a minor controversy. The Christian People's Party – which is the traditional home of Norway's religious right and which,

dwindling steadily in size over the last generation, clung on to power by its fingernails after the September elections, winning 3.8% of the vote and only three out of 169 seats – demanded that nursing Members of Parliament be allowed to breast-feed in the parliamentary chamber. Hansen responded by saying that nobody had ever told them they couldn't, and that she'd take action to ensure that this was understood by all.

Well, that one was resolved easily enough. But a bigger scandal was waiting in the wings. In November, it was revealed that Hansen, who represents the city of Trondheim, 250 miles north of Oslo, the capital, has actually lived since 2014 in Ski, a town just outside of Oslo. To maintain her official residency in Trondheim, she'd listed a room in the home of Trond Giske, a Labor politician who resigned from Parliament in 2018 after a sexual-harassment scandal, as her official residence.

But that wasn't all. Until 2017, Hansen had also occupied, at the taxpayers' expense, a furnished government-supplied apartment in Oslo – a clear violation of rules requiring that Members of Parliament live at least 40 kilometers (25 miles) from Oslo to qualify for one of these freebies. She was, it turned out, one of several MPs who'd cheated the public in this fashion. While keeping her seat in Parliament, Hansen stepped down as president of Parliament.

Which led to yet another controversy. For in Hansen's place, Støre appointed a Labor Party MP named Masud Gharahkhani.

Gharahkhani was not a parliamentary superstar. Born in Tehran in 1982, he and his family came to Norway as refugees in 1987. He and his wife, who met in 2002 while Gharahkhani was on vacation in Iran – yes, we'll get back to that – were married in Turkey in 2010. He works as a radiographer at Blefjell Hospital, and has only been an MP for four years. In 2018, *Aftenposten* ran a splashy profile of him under the headline "I eat hot dogs. I drink alcohol. And I believe in

God and am a Muslim, in my way.”

Although Gharahkhani was formally elevated to his new position by a vote of the full Parliament, it was really up to the Labor Party, specifically Prime Minister Støre, to fill the slot. In picking him, Støre passed over a host of Members with greater seniority and higher profiles. Given the Labor Party’s current racial and religious politics, his selection was not terribly surprising. Nor was the mainstream media’s uncritical response.

In the alternative media, however, there was pushback. Hans Rustad, editor of document.no, [wrote](#) on November 24 Gharahkhani’s appointment made one wonder if Støre and company “know which country they’re living in.” Rustad noted that the announcement came only days after *Kapital* (a financial magazine like *Forbes* or *Fortune*) named the Pakistani-Norwegian MP Hadia Tajik, Labor’s Deputy Leader, “Norway’s most powerful woman.” Also in recent weeks, another Pakistani MP, Abid Q. Raja, won the annual Booksellers Prize for his memoir *Min skyld*.

While Raja, an MP since 2013, has been famous in Norway for years (two decades ago, when he was the highly visible spokesman for the country’s largest mosque, I predicted that he’d become its first Muslim prime minister), Rustad pointed out that neither Tajik nor Gharahkhani is on most Norwegians’ radar. Does Støre care? Probably not. Like Democrats in the U.S., Labor Party folks in Oslo look upon most of their fellow countrymen as deplorables, and view foreignness as a plus, not a minus.

Rustad’s piece was followed by a December 8 [article](#) in which Helge Lurås, editor of resett.no, noted that Gharahkhani is a dual citizen of Iran and Norway, and that he and his wife both have relatives in Iran. How often, asked Lurås, have they been back? Others, after all, have been forced to resign from high-ranking positions because of less intimate foreign ties. Per

Sandberg had to quit as Fisheries Minister after taking a vacation in Iran; a Norges Bank official was forced out because his wife was Chinese.

Gharahkhani's situation is much more delicate. He and his wife rely on the mullahs to provide them with visas if they want to visit family members in Iran. And because Gharahkhani does have loved ones there, he's someone whom the Iranian government could easily subject to pressure and bend to their will. At the very least, their power over his and his wife's relatives could incline Gharahkhani to temper his public comments about the monstrous regime in Tehran.

Yet nobody in the Norwegian government or mainstream media seems willing to take this problem seriously. Gharahkhani refuses even to say whether he's used his Iranian passport to travel to Iran, and, if so, how many times. Years ago, a couple of agents of the Norwegian Police Security Service grilled *me* behind closed doors, because they considered me a potential threat to national security. Why, then, be so lax about Gharahkhani, who's actually in a position of power?

In Norway there's a 67-year-old comedian named Otto Jespersen. Years ago, when I watched Norwegian TV far more often than I do now, I found him quite funny; for a comedian in Norway, he was refreshingly un-PC. Addressing Norwegian Muslims in one [bit](#) from the early 2000s that could never be repeated today, he hilariously took on honor killing, forced marriage, stoning, and other Islamic practices, and in conclusion advised them to start celebrating Norway's Constitution Day, May 13, instead of the anniversary of 9/11.

But Jespersen was tamed soon enough. In 2003, in protest against the Iran War, he [burned](#) an American flag on camera. Some time later, he set fire to some pages from the Old Testament. (He's admitted that he wouldn't dare burn a Koran, because he doesn't want to be killed.) His lowest point came in 2008, when he said the following: "I would like to take the

opportunity to remember all the billions of fleas and lice that lost their lives in German gas chambers, without having done anything wrong other than settling on persons of Jewish background.”

Anyway, after reasonable concerns were raised about Gharahkhani’s Iranian ties, Jespersen saw an opportunity for his particular brand of comedy. The other evening, in a [monologue](#) for TV2, he wondered aloud why Rustad hadn’t gone after other people with foreign backgrounds who’ve taken important jobs from Norwegians. Jespersen proceeded to list high-ranking politicians whose ancestors came from Denmark and Scotland, and to point out that one of Norway’s top soccer stars is English. His clincher: King Haakon, grandfather of the current monarch, was Danish – so, by all rights, King Harald should abdicate and hand his throne over to a *real* Norwegian.

It was painfully safe, predictable stuff, the equivalent of the unfunny PC claptrap served up in the U.S. these days on the late-night talk shows and *Saturday Night Live*. Like Stephen Colbert and Jimmy Kimmel, Jespersen transformed some years ago from a truly edgy comic into a hack and a tool, toeing his masters’ political line while pretending to speak truth to power. In 2021, of course, it’s people like Rustad and Lurås who are speaking truth to power. Just as, thanks to the irrational xenophilia of Norway’s mainstream media and of the Norwegian equivalent of the D.C. Swamp, it’s people like Musad Gharahkhani and Hadia Tajik and Abid Q. Raja who increasingly hold in their hands the future of this little land of Hansens, Olsens, and Larsens.

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