

solved many transportation and communication issues. However, for us, neighbors have largely become intermediaries for purchases and smuggling from other countries, such as the UAE, which sells goods from those who have imposed sanctions on Iran. We either pay them in cash or provide goods, such as agricultural products that conceal significant water content, or, in the case of Iraq, our couriers resort to the informal market for goods.

Development hinges on global exchanges

Morteza Alviri, a reformist figure, in an interview with Khabar Online acknowledges the significant risks of not joining the FATF.

"There is no doubt that the continuation of the current situation will lead the country towards devastation, and Iran will face complete bankruptcy. Even friendly countries can no longer engage with us, and our cooperation with Europe must be completely disregarded."

The former parliament member finds the arguments of opponents unconvincing, stating that "Some believe that if we implement contractionary policies and adopt a self-sufficiency strategy, we can achieve development by relying solely on ourselves. However, global experiences demonstrate this undeniable reality: development depends on international exchanges. In other words, if we do not engage with the global community and fail to expose our products to the global market, and conversely, do not define our domestic products in competition with advanced technologies, we will face chronic underdevelopment."

"The FATF is an intergovernmental organization that has the capacity to monitor money laundering and the financing of terrorism. Almost all countries in the world are defined within this framework, and if they do not accept such arrangements, their banking operations and trade with one another will encounter difficulties. Unfortunately, for various reasons, Iran was not included in this framework and ultimately ended up on the FATF's blacklist. As a result, our exchanges with the world have become significantly more challenging. However, the issues we face in global transactions are not solely due to the FATF; sanc-

tions themselves are another factor contributing to these problems. In other words, even if we accept the FATF but remain under sanctions, our global trading issues will persist. However, accepting the FATF is a significant step, as even countries under sanctions have recognized the FATF and have overcome some hurdles."

The reformist politician, in response to the opponents, who say that the country's development should not be tied to global exchanges or sanctions, states that "If we look at various countries around the world, we can see how those countries, like Cuba or North Korea that have been caught in global sanctions have remained off the path of development."

Alviri warns that rejecting membership in the Palermo Convention, the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, could lead to not only economic constraints but also security challenges for Iran. "While we do not assert that joining will solve all of the country's problems, it can at least facilitate the process of addressing issues and moving towards a more normalized situation."

Increasing costs of exchanges

Davood Danesh-Jafari, a member of the Expediency Council, believes that resolving the FATF issue does not necessarily lead to the lifting of sanctions; however, failing to address it could cast a shadow over Iran's economy even after sanctions are lifted, increasing the costs of economic exchanges with the outside world by about fifteen to twenty percent.

Hamid Mirzadeh, the former head of the Organization of Planning and Budget, writes in Etemad newspaper that removing Iran from the FATF blacklist would improve banking standards, reduce both trade costs and risks associated with Iran, and prevent the re-imposition of countermeasures.

He lists several advantages of this development, including enhancing Iran's financial legitimacy, gaining access to international financial systems, lowering commercial risks, facilitating foreign investment, and strengthening economic relations. He also points to the improvement of the sanction's environment as another benefit of Iran's membership in this international organization.



The photo shows the last June FATF plenary in Berlin in 2022.

Membership could alleviate impact of sanctions

Although Mirzadeh agrees that joining the FATF will not lead to the lifting of sanctions, he states, "it can open avenues for negotiation and dialogue concerning existing economic sanctions, potentially leading to more favorable conditions." Furthermore, he notes that FATF membership would diminish the effects and scope of new sanctions and neutralize the justifications used by sanctioning entities.

According to Mirzadeh, joining the FATF would enable foreign purchases with greater selection and lower costs, eliminating the burden of higher expenses, which currently can reach up to 30%. He identifies securing new financial resources for the government as the final advantage of FATF membership, suggesting that it could facilitate the reintegration of Iran's economy into the global economy and strengthen its economic ties with other countries, thereby creating more opportunities for national growth and development and providing new financial resources for the government.

Lastly, he expresses concern that some analysts advocate for unilateral policies that are certainly contrary to the country's independence. These individuals passionately argue for Iran's membership in a specific bloc while perceiving FATF membership as a plunge into the embrace of the West. In reality, joining an intergovernmental body accepted by 200 countries, much like Iran's participation in various international organizations, serves to protect national interests and unlock economic barriers, particularly regarding the banking system. Currently, only three countries—Iran, North Korea, and Myanmar—are not members of this organization and are on its blacklist.

In contrast, as mentioned, critics of joining the FATF, despite supporting the fight against money laundering and wanting increased financial and economic transparency in the country, believe that given Iran's struggle against the United States and the sanctions imposed upon it, the country is inevitably forced to circumvent these sanctions. They argue that joining the FATF and accepting all its

conditions would essentially mean shackling ourselves and exposing our strategies for evading sanctions.

Nailing one's own foot

Mehr News Agency, quoting critics of FATF membership, states that despite rising import costs, as long as the issue of the unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States and the pressure on other countries to avoid economic cooperation with Iran remain unresolved, accepting all the FATF stipulations is merely "nailing one's own foot." They also contend that joining the FATF and adhering to all its conditions would effectively complicate support for groups, forces, and nations fighting for legitimate self-defense against Western powers and aggressors in the region. Critics assert that even with the implementation of FATF provisions by countries worldwide, the level of money laundering in international economic transactions remains high, with approximately 5% of global GDP being laundered—significantly occurring within Western nations themselves. Therefore, they argue that this treaty, contrary

to its proclaimed goals, has not effectively addressed financial crime and money laundering. They believe that, similar to the United Nations and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty within the atomic agency, the FATF exhibits a double standard and a colonial approach to issues, not only failing to assist independent nations but also trapping them in self-imposed constraints.

Opponents of joining this convention express grievances regarding the lack of transparency surrounding the Financial Action Task Force, claiming that accepting FATF is a form of significant and compounded self-sanctioning. Despite these considerations, the head of the government's information council states that Iran's accession to the FATF should be examined away from political controversies and should rely on specialized discussions among economic experts.

Elias Hazrati wrote on his account on the social media platform X: "I humbly invite all political activists to avoid political polarization for the dignity of Iran and to take steps towards convergence. Together, we stand for Iran."

