



# Two years of elaborate plotting to implicate Nadir: Witnesses to an alleged bribery plot now claim that they invented their evidence. Tim Kelsey reports

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WENDY Welsher and Michael Francis tell a bizarre story of a plot to implicate the fugitive tycoon Asil Nadir in a bribery scandal.

After more than two years of elaborate subterfuge, during which police arrested Nadir and his sister to investigate the bribery claim, the pair now say they invented the allegations.

The 'evidence' they gave concerning foreign bank accounts consisted of money given to them, they now say, by the Nadir family for legitimate business reasons. They confess to an elaborate, occasionally farcical, plot to pervert the course of justice. The police caused a sensation when they declared Nadir was being investigated for his role in an alleged conspiracy. They are still investigating the allegations.

Ms Welsher, 42, claims that her participation began in early 1991 when she was approached by Mr Francis, whom she knew as Michael Adams. The two had been involved in projects to build timeshare flats in Spain, and were involved in a plan to construct holiday apartments in Turkey.

Mr Francis told her that he needed her help to contact Nadir, who had been charged with false accounting and theft following the collapse of Polly Peck, and was on bail in London. She was to propose that Nadir would have his passport returned and be given leave to travel overseas, if he paid pounds 3.5m.

Ms Welsher claims she made contact with the Nadir family via business contacts in Turkey later that year. She visited Safiye Nadir, mother of Asil, in Northern Cyprus and tried to interest her in plans for the timeshare project in Istanbul. Mrs Nadir was interested but Ms Welsher did not broach the matter of the passport or the pounds 3.5m. She claims she just could not find a way of raising the matter.

Mr Francis has much contact with the police. His criminal record begins in 1962, when he was 17. It includes convictions for assault, for causing grievous bodily harm and for attempted murder (he was imprisoned for this for seven years). In 1980, he says, he began a new career: as a police informer. But he remains a professional criminal. In early 1991, he was wanted by police in Boston, Lincolnshire, for jumping bail.

Ms Welsher says that she did not become aware of Mr Francis's real name until late in 1991. She was beginning to make headway with the Nadirs by mid-1991; they were prepared to start contributing to the costs of a feasibility study for the apartments. She then arranged a meeting with Nadir's sister, Bilge, at a hotel in Paris in July 1991. Bilge gave pounds 100,000



for the feasibility study, Ms Welsher claims. She said the reason for holding the meeting in Paris was to avoid having to pay UK tax on the transaction; but she now claims this money was taken from Bilge under false pretences. The plan was to take the money and bank it in an account in a private bank in Zurich. Mr Francis had opened an account under the name of David Kent. The pounds 100,000, minus some money for expenses, was duly deposited. She signed agreements with Bilge and her mother Safiye Nadir over the timeshare plans. She claims that she doctored one of these to look as if it was signed on behalf of Asil Nadir. This document was later used as evidence of Nadir's intention to bribe the trial judge. Mr Francis claims that as another part of the plot Ms Welsher and he smuggled a painting called Sisters, by Lord Frederick Leighton, out of Britain and that he told police he had possession of it.

The police have declined to make any comment. It is, however, apparent that senior officers thought it likely the painting was in his possession, and may still be. Mr Francis spoke to Det Chief Supt Tom Glendinning, head of the Organised and International crime branch at Scotland Yard in September, and recorded their conversation. In it, Mr Francis offers to return the painting, saying: 'Well, obviously I don't carry around that poxy painting. That painting is a bit big to lug about, Tom.' Det Chief Supt Glendinning replies: 'Well, it's not a great big bag is it? Well, all right.' The trustees-in-bankruptcy have been looking for the painting for two years and have expressed concern that the police did not tell them of Mr Francis's claim.

During the course of the alleged attempt to manufacture evidence, Mr Francis went to ground on more than one occasion - worried, he says, that he may be set up. In one instance, he arrived back in the UK under the name Terence Bithell and with a false passport. He was arrested by Gatwick police in August 1992. Police discovered in his briefcase documents which suggested that he had been involved in small arms trading. He was detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act and interviewed by the anti-terrorist branch. However, the ATB stopped their investigation and he was charged only with possession of a false passport. It has been ascertained that officers attached to the Serious Fraud Office had meetings with him after his appearances at Crawley magistrates' court during September 1992. His solicitor's brief to counsel states: 'during the course of his remand in custody Mr Francis has . . . been able to assist the Serious Fraud Office in the investigation of a very serious matter'.

Mr Francis was granted bail - for a reason that was not explained to his solicitor, the Crown Prosecution Service told the court that his previous bail offences were not pursued - in October.

Shortly afterwards, he claims he visited Zurich where he met Det Supt Jim Davies, who was on attachment to the Serious Fraud Office. The intention of the trip, according to Mr Francis, was to reassure Det Supt Davies that he had the painting, documents and tape recordings of Nadir in his possession. These recordings were fictional - Mr Francis says he told police he had them because the rest of the conspiracy (their attempts to get money for the concocted 'bribery fund') were not being successful.

In November 1992, Wendy Welsher claims that she received a death threat, and believed it came from someone who had knowledge of her relationship with the police. She decided to fly to northern Cyprus and to tell her story to Nadir's mother in the hope that she and her two-year-old daughter would be given protection. Mrs Nadir, who knew Ms Welsher as a businesswoman, refused to believe what she heard about this manufactured conspiracy. Ms Welsher left a note, dated 12 November 1992, with Nadir's sister, who was in Cyprus at the time, saying: 'I tried to explain everything to your mother . . . and my involvement with the police and the British authorities . . . I also told your mother to ring you and warn you that you and Asil were about to be arrested.'

On 5 November, Nadir and his sister, Bilge, were arrested in connection with a Scotland Yard investigation, headed by Det Chief Supt Glendinning, into an alleged plot to pervert the course of justice. They were not charged. This investigation not only examined allegations of a pounds 3.5m 'bribery fund', but also looked at claims that Nadir had set up a secret fund of 750m German marks in Liech tenstein. Mr Francis and Ms Welsher now say that this was another invention designed to entrap Nadir. Ms Welsher returned to the UK after her abortive attempt to seek asylum in Cyprus. By this time she was an important 'witness' to the plot and police, she says, were furious that she had gone to Cyprus. They moved her from her home in Edgware and took her under their wing. She became a protected witness. Her bills were paid by the police and she says she was given pounds 100 a week to spend. In August 1993 she was moved to a police safe house in Shrewsbury where she remained until deciding to leave the country.



She accepted an offer of immunity made in April 1993 in a letter signed by Chris Newell, a senior executive at the CPS, but was concerned that she could not rely on it. It guaranteed that she would not be prosecuted for evidence she gave regarding the alleged conspiracy involving Nadir, but she would place herself outside the terms of that immunity if she committed perjury in court.

Scotland Yard has refused to comment on the relationship between Mr Francis and Ms Welsher and the Organised and International branch, but has said it is wholly satisfied that no police were at any time involved in a conspiracy to pervert the course of justice. The Serious Fraud Office said it did not wish to comment.

(Photograph omitted)