

The U.S. Role in Iran- EU Relations (1990-2020)

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Abstract

In view of the EU's position in international policy arena and its evolving foreign relations with I.R.I, this research first attempts to elucidate the background of EU-I.R.I foreign relations as well as the EU foreign policy towards Iran and then proceeds to address the importance of Iran for the EU. Efforts have also been put into giving an account of the US role in convergence and divergence of such relations followed by examination of the EU and the Middle East, Iran and WMD as well as issues of human rights and democracy in Iran-EU relations. However, due to interruptions in discourse making in all fields of Iran-EU foreign relations, it seems that these two important actors have not utilized the available opportunities in political terms with significant impacts on their bilateral commercial and economic ties.

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Introduction

The European Union (the EU) is composed of 28 European countries the initial core of which was formed around the Rome Treaty of 1957. This union which primarily intended to further an economic, trade and customs agenda has now permeated into political, security and cultural spheres following a vast expansion of scope. With a population of over 500 million and undergoing numerous peaks and troughs from its inception, the EU has turned into an important actor in international politics. The EU members have been attempting to further cement the union's position in the international system through extending their roles into a variety of fields. The EU has been particularly passionate about playing a role in resolution of regional and international crises. Iran nuclear has been a prime example in which the EU has established itself as a primary actor. Therefore, this is the research question: what factors influence the EU foreign policy regarding the I.R.I and what role is played by the US in this process? It appears that this policy has focused on a number of issues such as the US role, the human rights situation in Iran and the latter's decision to implement Additional Protocols. The US and the EU converge on strategic policies, notably on security while pursuing an Atlantic convergence. However, they compete with each other in economic, political, security and international fields and the means of their attainment while trying to boost regional convergence which reveal signs of trans-Atlantic divergence. As we proceed, the EU's position concerning each issue as well as Iran's relevant views and impressions will be covered.

I. Backgrounds of EU-Iran Relations

In years following the victory of the Islamic revolution, although both Iranian politicians and European observers believed that compared to the US and USSR, West Europe could carve a better, distinguished and more stable position in both political and economic fields in Iran, a series of challenging issues at the early and Mid 80s (Iraq-Iran armed conflict, Iran's bid to export its revolution, Western hostages in Lebanon and the issue of Selmán Rushdie) strained these relations. The crisis in bilateral relations reached its tipping point when the Mykonos Incident unfolded in 1992 shortly after the formation of the EU. Reviewing the background of Iran-EU relations is important on several accounts:

1. Iran's relations with Western Europe countries constitute an important part of Iran's foreign policy background as well as European countries' relations with the Middle East
2. European countries (Western Europe) contribute to over than one third of Iran's foreign trade
3. Due to primarily trade disagreements rather than political ones, Iranian politicians believe that they are capable of creating a divergence in the Western block (Europe and the US)
4. The EU and Iran foreign policies converge on opposition to a unipolar order and the US-led unilateralism in the world of post-cold war (Holiday, 1998: 130-151).

A study of developments in Iran relations with Western Europe could mark the general direction of Iran's foreign policy towards Europe and vice versa. It also could explain how the escalating factors in Iran's relations with the European Community in the past are still relevant. As a matter of fact, the conduct of Iran's foreign policy indicates a series of domestic and international considerations which persisted up to the end of 90s. These considerations were fuelled by pre-Revolution interventions and hostilities and a post-Revolution divided society (along the lines of extremists-moderates). Problems Iran faced in and out of its political boundaries meant there was no firm diplomatic determination for resolution of issues. Iran, like all other revolutionary countries, followed a two-track policy as its

revolutionary diplomatic policy which made I.R.I's foreign policy unpredictable in the eyes of Westerners (Ehteshami, 1995: 15-17). The end of Iraq-Iran armed conflict and adoption of pragmatic political and trade policies by Iran's then president (late Hashemi Rafsanjani) as a reflection of domestic economic needs for reconstruction of the country revived the hopes of normalization of Iran's relations with the West (with the exception of the US).

There were a number of arguments in favor of improved Iran-Western Europe relations in post-Revolution era:

1. In the first place, the Western Europe countries were among Iran major trading partners. On the other hand, because of commitment to the policy of "neither East nor West", Iran was logically expected to be more inclined to Western Europe and Japan in absence of any relations with the US. In the second place, while the UK had a background of colonialism and interference in Iran, other West European countries had no such history (Holiday, 1998: 130-151).

France as the most secular country in the world had the opening to establish the best relations with I.R.I thanks to Imam Khomeini's stay in Neauphle-le-Château in 1977. However, France's decision to grant asylum in early 80s to the ousted President Abolhassan Banisadr and Massoud Rajavi (the MKO chief) and two countries' disagreements over Lebanon put them on opposing sides. This was further compounded by France's refusal to refund Iran for its last monarch's investment of 14 billion USD in Eurodif project. Ultimately, France selling Dassault Mirage fighters to Baghdad, detention of an Iranian diplomat in Vahid Gorji in Paris and murder of Shahpour Bakhtiar in Paris drove the relations into a no man's land for an extended period of time. It seems that Germany was in a better position compared to France thanks its favorable commercial and trade ties with Iran. Iran's imports from Germany rose to 26% in 80s from 22% in 1987. Also, following the conclusion of Iraq-Iran war in August 1988, then Germany Foreign Secretary, Hans-Dietrich Genscher was the first high ranking European official to pay a

visit to Iran in November 1988 (Holiday, 1998: 134).

With the institution of the EU political identity in the wake of Maastricht Treaty, Europe that had founded a second pillar under the title of “foreign policy and joint security”, embarked on a series of talks with other countries individually or within regional agreements to create a free trade zone and conclude bilateral trade arrangements for the ultimate goal of advancing its influence and playing the role of a global actor. As regarding Iran, the EU adopted the policy of critical dialogue. In contrast to the US political-trade sanctions, the EU’s policy was seeking both establishing diplomatic relations with Iran and engaging Iran in disputed issues such as human rights, the Middle East peace process and WMD proliferation. It should be noted that dialogue has invariably been a fixed component of Europe’s policy regarding Iran. In spite of serious disagreements and strained relations on a number of occasions, EU-Iran political relations have never been ruptured. Although the decision of Mykonos court in Berlin in 1997 marked the end of critical dialogue era, the new round of “constructive and comprehensive” talks were kick started in following years (Byman and Chubin, 2001: 34-46). As a matter of fact, Europeans believed that the window of talks with Iran should always be open due to Iran’s geo-economic and strategic location, its possession of rich energy resources and communication routes and failure of the policy of Dual Containment on Iran, yet with a different tone. Moreover, this dialogue should adopt an extensive agenda including signing a trade agreement and expansion of EU-Iran cooperation (The Christian Science Monitor, 1997). Before 9/11, there was no precondition to conclusion of this agreement. However, this incident seemed to have engendered a massive development in Iran-EU ties. In post-9/11, the EU subjected continued talks with Iran to alleviation of predominantly security concerns and the human right situation in Iran. As a matter of fact, we would like to find out whether such relations are based on a mutual political will to extricate Iran from a political isolation and further EU influence

and presence in the region or it intends to create reciprocal economic dependence through enhancing investments and foreign trade to serve the goal of stronger security. On political and economic grounds, the EU seeks closer links with Iran (The Christian Science Monitor, 1997). The EU-Iran trade relations play an important role in shaping the ties between the parties. According to statistics on the trade volume of Iran and the EU in 2007 which amounted to 317.25 billion Euros, Iran exported 126.14 billion Euros worth of goods to Europe and imported 17.11 billion Euros worth of goods. It should be noted that 88% of Iran's exports to the EU was energy supplies while major part of the EU's exports to Iran was industrial machinery and transportation vehicles worth of 4.3 billion Euros which displayed a 9.21 decrease compared to the corresponding period of the previous year. A study of Iran-EU exchanged trade commodities shows that the main components of this trade have not undergone significant changes compared to the previous year with oil still ranking top of Iran's exports to the EU with an 88% share while the EU's exports to Iran had an even growth. As per Euro Start (EU Statistics Center), Italy, Germany, France and Spain were EU's biggest Iran's trading partners in the first eight months of the year 2012 with Germany ranking first with 53.2 billion Euros of exports to Iran followed by Italy with 41.51 billion, Spain with 23.1 billion and France with 930 million Euros. In terms of imports from Iran, Italy came first with 903.2 billion Euros followed by France with 562.1 billion, Greece with 347.1 and Spain with 931 million Euros while Germany only imported 338 million Euros worth of goods in the same period (The Christian Science Monitor, 2008).

It goes without saying that Tehran-Brussels underwent numerous ups and downs in post-Revolution era with 4 distinct eras:

Era of Hostility and Mistrust: Prior to the statement of the UK-led European Community Summit in Edinburgh (December 1992), an atmosphere of mistrust prevailed over Iran-European

Community relations. With the USSR disintegration and issuance of the aforementioned statement, this hostile policy was abandoned; Europe recognized the change of political system in Iran and opted for critical engagement with Iran which placed critical dialogue with Iran on the agenda of the European Community.

Era of Critical Dialogue: Once Iran's then president sent a letter to heads of European Community signaling Iran's readiness to start dialogue and Denmark Prime Minister as the then president of European Community replied to this letter (March 1993), Iran-European Community relations took a new shape and continued in form of critical dialogue. At the conclusion of European Community Summit in Edinburgh (11 and 12 December 1992), a statement issued in which the necessity of sustained dialogue with Iran was stressed in view of the latter's importance in the region. For the EU, issues such as human rights situation, Imam Khomeini's fatwa against Salman Rushdie, terrorism, weapons etc had to be addressed within the framework of critical dialogue. The first round of I.R.I and the EU (England, Denmark and Belgium) took place in Copenhagen in June 1993 and focused on Iran's relations with USSR and (Persian) Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members, arms control, human rights, the Middle East Peace Process, Afghanistan, Iran and Central Asia's republics. The second round of I.R.I and the EU negotiations took place in Brussels in October 1993 and focused on narcotics, arms reduction, recognition of IAEA's representative and convention of joint human rights seminars. The third round of I.R.I and the EU (Belgium, Greece and Germany) negotiations took place in Athens in May 1994 and focused on supporting the peace and compromise process in the Middle East, refugees in Iran, Iran's hostages in Lebanon and narcotics.

The fourth round of I.R.I and the EU negotiations took place in Copenhagen in December 1993 and focused on praising Iran's humanitarian measures for refugees, significant advances in Iran's legal system, continuation of democratic elections in Iran,

criticizing the activities of foreign groups against Iranians and France's ban on Hijab (veil) for Muslim students. The fifth round of I.R.I and the EU negotiations took place in Paris in June 1995 and focused on criticizing human rights situation in Iran, slamming the EU's double standards and arbitrary approach to human rights and the situation of Muslim minorities in Europe by Iran etc.

The sixth round of I.R.I and the EU negotiations took place in Rome on June 2, 1996 during which the Middle East peace process, terrorism, Selman Rushdie, human rights, regional security and Bosnian issue were raised by European side while Iranian delegations talked about the why and how of continuation of critical dialogue, reaping the benefits of NPT and Convention on Chemical Weapons, the status of refugees in Iran, the EU behavior towards terrorist groups and Iran's previous proposals for scientific cooperation with the EU.

The seventh round of I.R.I and the EU negotiations took place in Dublin on November 29, 1996 and focused on Iran criticizing the mechanism of dialogue, the EU's critique of the Berlin incident (Mykonos) and expression of solidarity with Germany, Selman Rushdie, the EU's critique of human rights situation in Iran, negotiations on the situation of the Middle East, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Iraq etc. The critical dialogue came to halt following the crisis prompted by decision of the Mykonos court (Berlin court) in April 1997.

Era of Comprehensive Dialogue: The presidential election of May 23, 1997 put an end to the process of critical dialogue and ushered in a new discourse environment for Iran's relations with the international community, the EU in particular. This time the parties agreed on continued dialogue within the framework of comprehensive talks. European ambassadors who had left Iran in the wake of the Mykonos incident returned to their posts in October 1997 and the first round of comprehensive talks were held in summer 1998 during the term of Austrian presidency of the EU. These talks continued for 5 years (up to 2003) and

covered 10 rounds of negotiations.

Iran-EU comprehensive talks were a far cry from previous talks in terms of format, content and organization mechanism. In addition to issues of concerns for the EU (terrorism, human rights, disarmament and the ME peace), these talks addressed bilateral cooperation in fields of energy, trade and investment, narcotics, asylum seekers and refugees, exportation of non-petroleum products to European markets, reducing the risk of investment in Iran, environment, regional issues (Iraq, Afghanistan, the Persian Gulf, the Caspian sea, Central Asia, Caucuses, the Balkans and the ME) as well as a number of international issues such as Dialogue of Civilizations and cooperation between ECO & OIC with the EU.

Era of Unmitigated Mistrust: Once Europe became suspicious of Iran's peaceful nuclear program, comprehensive talks and its associated cooperation programs were suspended. The characteristics of this era are as follows:

Europe's persistent suspicions on the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program and cessation of progressive and constructive talks with Iran; Europe's demand for suspension of uranium enrichment which was rejected by Iran; Iran's rejection of the EU's incentive package table by then High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Javier Solana; The EU Referring Iran's nuclear dossier to UNSC; UNSC passing 3 resolutions for sanctioning Iran; Iran's insistence on legitimate and peaceful nature of its program within the framework of NPT; Javier Solana visiting Tehran and presenting a new package prepared by 5+1; Iran presenting EU with a counter-package in an preemptive initiative

II. EU's Foreign Policy Towards Iran

On July 2, 2001 the EC sent a report to both European parliament and European council detailing the nature of the EU's relations with I.R.I. This landmark report possesses such importance that could be seen as a seminal document in shaping EU's foreign

policy towards Iran. Another equally important document was the meeting of the EU's foreign secretaries in Greek Thessaloniki (19-20 June, 2003). For this, the EU's foreign policy position regarding Iran as well as the remarks and statements of European high ranking officials will be addressed for better understanding of the EU's foreign policy.

European Commission Report: In November 2001, the EC as the EU's executive entity submitted a 7-point report on the status of its foreign relations with Iran and stated that EU currently had no contract-based relations with Iran. Also on July 2, 2001, this commission submitted another 7-point report on the status of its foreign relations with Iran to both European parliament and European council detailing issues such as the "background, the current status of Iran, trade and economy, Iran-European Community cooperation, the EU's interests and existing challenges to further cooperation" (European Commission, 2004: 1-8). According to the report of the commission, the EU's agenda within the framework of constructive talks which revolve around "constructive dealing" should cover three fields:

A. Global Issues which primarily follow challenging issues with Iran within the framework of conflicting interests. The issues in question were "terrorism, WMD proliferation and human rights"

B. Regional Issues as a combination of relations which are informed by cooperation and rivalry within the framework of parallel interests, such as "Arabs-Israel Peace process, Iraq, Afghanistan, Central Asia countries and Caucuses".

C. Cooperation that is manifested in common interests such as "trade and investments, energy, displaced people and drug trafficking" (European Parliament and Council, 2001: 2). Along these lines, concluding a commercial agreement with Iran with developmental goals could be an option. This agreement would be a non-preferential one centered on financial and economic cooperation in fields of mutual interests and trade liberation which includes provisions such as "the most favored principle",

avoidance of discrimination and WTO standards. It also considers development of closer cooperation with Iran in fields such as energy, transportation, environment, drug control, migration, asylum-seeking and human rights. EU Council of Ministers agreed on June 17, 2002 to recognize EC's directive for conclusion of a Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) and initiate a series of talks with Iran on human rights with no precondition. It also decided to further political cooperation in parallel with the TCA.

Iran's Position in the EU's Stances Toward the Middle East: The Middle East is one of the five priority areas in the EU's joint security and foreign policy. It has been included to support the peace process in this region through applying economic and political mechanisms (Bretherton and Volger, 1991: 183-184). The Middle East, a traditional sphere of influence for Europe before the US hegemony over the international system, was suddenly fell into grips of a unipolar international order in the wake of declining power of European countries and USSR disintegration. This led to loss of spheres of influence in the region for Europe. Furthermore, existing political disagreements among European countries, particularly about the US invasion of Iraq rendered Iran as an important country in the ME for retention of the influence. As regards the importance of EU-Iran for creation of regional peace and stability in the ME, the spokesperson for policies of development of faction of Christian Social Union and Christian Democratic Union (CSU/CDU) parties, Christian Rook who had visited Iran as a member of a parliamentary delegation summarized the results of his talks with Iran's parliament officials as "the ME stability and in particular Iran are in line with our strategic interests". He added "we have to lay the grounds for closer and more extensive cooperation with Iran for establishment of peace and security and expansion of welfare in the ME. We have to demonstrate that we attach great importance to Iran's participation, in particular for crises in the ME, Iraq and Afghanistan. Iran should be actively involved in the

ME peace process and take on more responsibilities in this respect. Iran should support “two-state solution” based on the “road map”. This issue should be included in the framework of constructive talks with Iran (Shargh Daily, 2003). The ME’s importance for Europe should be seen from security, political and trade perspectives. As a matter of fact, European Community’s overarching goal in the ME is tied to the furtherance of its political, security and economic interests. These policies have been adopted for enhancing regional stability and security, supplies of raw materials, oil in particular which are crucial to the EU. For this, European Economic Community has plans in place to intensify mutual economic dependence with ME to prevent any country from risking its good relations with the EU for a regional conflict. To meet such goals, the EU has initiated profitable economic ties with one of the richest and biggest import markets in the world (the ME) in exchange for development and aid programs (Von Leevmen, 1999: 8). Therefore it is obvious that EU will enter into a series of cooperation agreements with a large number of regional states including Israel owing to the importance of ME (Alibani, 2001: 224). Joffe, George, a political analyst, in his think piece titled “relations between the ME and the West: perspective from the South” has defined the EU’s foreign policy regarding the ME in a new format:

1. Since we are witnessing a growing trend of integration of regional countries in global economy, the Mediterranean-Europe economic initiative which is envisioned to extend to the Persian Gulf is the best methodology to contribute to this trend.

2. Subjecting Western political and economic aids to observance of western norms in the region (respecting human rights, guarantees on rights of minorities and establishment of democratic states) along with the Mediterranean-Europe economic initiative could be a potent tool in imposition of Western pressures.

3. There are new regional security issues indicating Western concerns about access to energy resources and stability of

dependent and friendly regimes. These concerns would be aggravated in case of integration of Central Asia into the Great Middle East plan. On the other hand, oil and water as two crucial resources could threaten the regional stability. Besides, the involvement of non-ideological state actors that rival the regional states with political Islam persuasions is another major concern of the West in the ME (Joffe, 1998: 51-52).

As a matter of fact, the EU dependence on the ME energy resources and on a wider context, the importance of the ME security are much greater for the EU than the US. Economically, the EU members are closer to Iran and Libya compared to the US and have a bigger dependence than the latter on the oil of these countries, Iran in particular (Aliboni, 2001: 226). A large number of European countries have mutual traditional relations with Iran and Libya. For example, while French and German companies do business with Iran and Italian companies have trade ties with Libya, US has categorized these countries as rogue (Von Leevmen, 1999:14).

It seems that EU-ME interdependence far exceeds the US economic ties with the latter. For instance, the EU's oil imports from the ME is double as much as that of the US and for this the EU opposes US trade tariffs as they feel more vulnerable in case of uncertain energy supplies or a security vacuum (Marr, 1998: 74-104). Michael George Johansson, a political analyst stated "the more Europe manages to make Iran as the base of their strategic policies in the ME, the better they could rival the US in setting up the Great ME plan". A terrorism lawyer in Europe also remarked that "Iran for Europe is the same as Iraq for the US. Without Iraq, the US would have never been able to stabilize its presence in the region and secure a landing place for its troops to implement its long-term strategic policies. Now Europe seeks to turn Iran into a base. We of course are trying, through our strategic policies, not to incur so much cost as the US did. What matters most that a safe Iran that is allied to Europe is the best weapon to contain terrorism against Europe" (Shargh Daily, 2004). For Europe, a safe and

reliable Iran means security in ME. Security in ME is defined as the EU's vast investments, stopping unchecked immigration and ultimately inhibiting spillover of potentially security crisis to the EU. For this, in contrast to their northern counterparts, Europe's southern countries have primarily a security attitude rather than a human rights one. Because of their geographical location, they are the first to be affected by outbreak of crises in the Mediterranean and the ME. However, since the EU lacks means of political influence, the best solution lies in wielding political-economic tools in the ME rather than resorting to military might (Colombia international affairs online, 1999: 2-4).

It appears that the foreign policy of I.R.I's 8th Administration is to a great extent in line with the EU's foreign policy of playing a role in the ME. As proof of our point, it is just enough to analyze the statements and remarks of EU's high ranking foreign policy officials. For example, in negotiations of Iran's then minister of foreign affairs, Kamal Kharazi with his Spanish counterpart Jose Maria Aznar on October 23, 2000, the former referred to better EU's understanding of the advances made in the ME and praised the EU's efforts for resolution of crises in that volatile region. Mr. Kharazi also stressed that the ME should not be monopolized by a single power (www.mfa.gov.ir) although there are disagreements between Iran and the EU over terrorism and terrorist groups, particularly concerning issues in the ME.

The EU and Iran's Nuclear Case: When it came to the resolution of I.R.I's nuclear crisis, the EU's preferred diplomatic solutions to hard options. Tehran's declaration marked the start of EU-Iran negotiations. Although the EU shared the US intention to stop Iran from going nuclear, it adopted a totally different mechanism. The EU's dual policy sent Iran's nuclear dossier to UNSC where a resolution had been drafted by France and the UK (Ebrahimi Far and Arian Far, 2010, 109).

Following the referral of Iran's case to UNSC in February 2006, 5+1 adopted the policy of stick and carrot regarding Iran. In an atmosphere of mistrust, UNSC adopted five resolutions against

Iran's nuclear program. The UK, France and Germany played a key role in both the drafts and final texts of the resolutions. The resolution had called on Iran to suspend all its uranium enrichment and heavy water projects and take some confidence-building measures. In February 2000, the EU trio called for imposition of harsher sanctions on Iran. Through massive efforts of European countries and the US, UNSC passed Resolution 1929 on June 19, 2010 with 12 affirmative votes (Farhang, 2013: 11-16).

EU involvement in these inhumane sanctions reveals its visible permeability to the US and the Zionist regime's policies against Iran. New sanctions were a significant change in policy for Europeans who by the time were attempting to impose certain economic restrictions on specific individuals and companies. The EU has been intentionally slower than the US in instatement of sanctions against Iran as it is not willing to punish ordinary Iranian citizens because of their government's acts. At the same time, the EU was seeking to adopt an act on banning exports of oil from Iran effective from July 2012. In a pre-emptive act in February 2012, Iran's parliament passed a 2-star motion forbidding the government from selling oil to the EU members so long as Iran oil sanction act was in place (Wagner and Onderco, 2014: 718-720).

European states had a consistent position regarding sanctions on Iran. They had disagreements only on the severity and timing of the sanctions. They believed Iran's development of nuclear capability would project Iran's power across the region and would grant it a regional hegemonic position that could endanger international security and thus were struggling to rein in Iran's influence (Onderco, 2015: 54-58).

The EU and Iran's Nuclear Case: A new chapter was opened in nuclear negotiations after direct negotiations between Iran and the US's foreign secretaries followed by a phone conversation between two presidents. In next round of Iran and 5+1 negotiations in November 2013 in Geneva, Iran's foreign

secretary met the EU's then Foreign Policy Chief Catherine Ashton prior to the start of negotiations. On the sidelines of Iran and 5+1 negotiations, Iran and Germany's foreign secretaries met and talked about issues of mutual interests. However, 3-day intensive Geneva talks were inconclusive and the parties agreed to resume negotiations 10 days later in the same city. Before the third round of Iran-5+1 negotiations, Iran's foreign secretary Zarif travelled to Rome upon the formal invitation of Italian foreign secretary and talked to his counterpart about mutual regional and international issues (Entessar and Afrasiabi, 2015: 11-14). On the sidelines of the negotiations with 5+1, Zarif met Swiss foreign secretary and thanked Swiss government for arranging the talks. The positive environment led to the conclusion of Geneva 6-month agreement on November 24, 2013 which was the first effective step in resolution of Iran's nuclear program issue in the last ten years (Entessar and Afrasiabi, 2015: 78-79). The agreement provided for Iran to reduce its enrichment to 5% and avoid increasing its centrifuges and in return 5+1 would lift some of the sanctions and restore Iran's frozen assets with foreign banks. According to this agreement, Iran was allowed to export petrochemical and polymer products to the EU. On March 2, 2014 Spanish foreign secretary visited Tehran and expressed his satisfaction with the new developments in nuclear talks and underlined his country's readiness to expand cooperation with Iran in a variety of political, economic and cultural fields. In March of the same year, then EU then Foreign Policy Chief Catherine Ashton visited Iran and met Iran's President, Speaker of the parliament and Secretary of National Security Supreme Council. In August 2015, Iran and 5+1 agreed to extend Geneva interim agreement for another four months up to November 24, 2014. In January 2015, the parties agreed to extend the interim agreement for another 7 months to pave the way for conclusion of a final, comprehensive deal (Adebahr, 2017: 37-44).

Human Rights and Democracy in Iran-EU Relations: The relation between the processes of creation of democracy and

Western economic interests has not been systematically examined. Although many see the international capital as the primary driver of democracy, the reverse is also true. In other words, democracy could fuel stronger economic growth and gaining the power in a developing world (Bernstein and Berger, 1998: 38). From a radical perspective, trans-national capital plays an important role in approaching a weak version of democracy while promotion of democracy should be studied as a political manifestation of a trans-national economic project since Western powers consider democracy and neo-liberalism as inextricably linked (Young, 2001: 13). To back up this claim, one of the criticisms leveled at the US policies for promotion of democracies in 80s via multinational companies was manipulation of democracy by these companies as a bargaining chip to serve their own interests and suppress social uprising in authoritarian regimes followed by introduction a weak version of democracy in such countries that mainly served their political and economic interests (Gills and others, 1993). For skeptics, economic issues and terms such as global commercial arrangements, economic conditions and development of standards have a much profounder impact on international processes of democracy than political conditions or political aid projects. In other words, this idea that democracy promotion agendas were compatible with Western security and commercial interests found a foothold in Western countries. This made the imposition of punitive measures for violators of Western democracy wrong and thus a constructive approach characterized with dialogue and economic aid was chosen as the favorable mechanism of engagement (Young 2001: 26-27). In addition to such positive tools, coercive options were as well considered. The EU picked up such tools to suspend or cancel its contractual relations with third parties seen as violators of democratic principles followed by stipulation of honoring human rights in Lomé Convention of 1989. In May 1992 it was decided that any cooperation and participation agreement concluded with Central and Eastern Europe countries should carry the stipulation that “any violation

of human rights, democracy and free market economy triggers the suspension of such arrangements". Furthermore, the EU standardized human rights concepts to neutralize the critiques and pressures of developing countries that had accused the EU of adopting double standards and make democracy and human rights apolitical issues to win the trust of developing countries (Young, 2001: 34-36).

Another accusation leveled by developing countries to adoption of double standards is that a number of developing countries that possess strategic-security importance and have energy resources have prompted discriminatory behaviors in European countries. For example, the Mediterranean is the primary cause of security concern for Europe, particularly Southern Europe. The geographical proximity with these countries has led to emergence of two policies in the EU in dealing with the ME and the Mediterranean. While Europe Southern Wing (Italy, French, Spain, Portugal and Greece) are demanding less democratic and political pressures on these countries in favor of having more cooperation with moderate reformist movements and stress a security attitude with strategic necessity, the Northern Wing insist on moral principles. This ultimately led to a third solution which was removal of the provision of democracy from Barcelona Process (Young, 2001: 47-64).

EU north countries were still flagging this argument that more pressures could be imposed on authoritarian and repressive regimes without jeopardizing the short-term regional security. Germany has shown the strongest willingness to play a median role between north and south EU states for meeting this ultimate goal: placing pressure on development of an independent civil society should take place in a discreet manner and through NGOs rather than resorting to coercive methodologies and pressurizing the states. Therefore the promotion of democracy in the Mediterranean is supposed to take place through market reforms and economic means. However, Southern Europe insisted that even with the option of economic pressures, any decision to freeze

aid to developing countries on account of their violation of human rights had to taken with consensual voting to make trade sanctioning more difficult while Northern Europe (except for the UK) insisted on adequacy of majority of votes (Kohler, 1998: 1-3). This account has been given (the EU's position on the Mediterranean) because of its similarities with the process of the EU's stances regarding human rights and democracy Iran. In 2001, the mechanism of renewing rapport between Iran and 15 European countries led to an outbreak of disagreements between Northern Wing led by the UK & Nordic countries and Southern ones. While Northern Europe voiced their dissatisfaction with Iran's human rights profile and its attempts to acquire WMD, Southern countries were in favor of further communication with reformist government of Mohammad Khatami to both gain trade opportunities and strengthen his government (Dawe Newspaper, 17/2/2007). Then European Commissioner for External Relations, Christopher Francis Patten offers an in-between view on the link between human rights and conclusion of trade and cooperation agreements with Iran "There are some of our agreements [with third countries] which include human rights clauses. I'm not sure whether Trade and Cooperation Agreements customarily do. But certainly, what I explained to the minister [Kharrazi], was that human rights would be a part of our dialogue. EU has serious concerns about the abuse of press freedoms in Iran and the suppression of political opposition, as well as Iran's policy of publicly executing criminals" (Lobjakas , 2001). Also, Christian Rook said "although we have some democratic institutions and structures in Iran along non-elected political institutions, the elected parliaments and the voters have negligible influence in Iran's political structure. Critics of the state are under pressure as was the case in the past and any effort for social freedom is blocked. So long as Iran does not adequately respect democracy and human rights, finding ways of economic cooperation with Iran is challenging" (Shargh Daily, 2003). This opposition has been intensified since the start of the 9th Administration.

Introduction of the Social Security scheme which required dealing with mobs, individuals harassing people, public nuisances and drug dealers subjected Iran yet again to accusations of violation of human rights.

In return, Iran has challenged the Western approach to human rights in international organizations, dissuaded them from pursuing human rights issues and instrumental use of this issue and maximized the costs of such acts for them thanks to assistance from its co-thinking countries (Schumacher, 2015: 132-133).

Every year, the EU presents a human rights report offering the EU's vision and assessment of its measures in field of human rights, particularly on Iran. Iran human rights experts have criticized the EU for stoking Islamophobia in Europe, discriminating Muslims, instrumental use of freedom of expression and criminal punishments, its extensive efforts to project itself as perfect and ignoring fields in which Iran has notched massive advances in recent decades (Katzman, 2017:13-14).

III. EU-Iran in Post-JCPOA Era

Resolution of Iran's nuclear case and the post-JCPOA environment created a new field for Iran and the EU to revive their relations based on new and mutual needs. Mutual relations, Syrian and the ME crisis, post-JCPOA cooperation and expansion of cultural and economic cooperation were shared points in agendas of all European officials' visits to Iran. Major axes of these negotiations could be placed in two economic and political-diplomatic categories.

Economic Relations: JCPOA managed to defuse, to some extent, the tension between Iran and European countries. However, this deal was given the brush-off by Europeans. The nuclear deal could have transformed Iran-EU mutual ties to place them on a natural growing trend. Having welcomed JCPOA and the subsequent openings, the EU intended to demonstrate the importance of Iran in the EU's foreign policies. For the EU, the

political and economic-trade calculations have always carried massive importance. In the first four months of 2015, Iran-EU trade exchanges rose by 9% to 2.4 billion Euros. The trade volume of the corresponding period of the previous year stood at 2.2 billion Euros. The trade exchanges of two parties had experienced a 20% increase in the entire 2014. In contrast, these exchanges had dropped by 47% in 2013 compared to its previous year (Erlanger, 2018: 62-67).

According to the reports, the EU's exports from Iran in the first four months of 2017 had reached 413.3 billion Euros with a five-fold increase. The exchanges went down to 557.6 billion Euros in first four months of 2016 from 887.2 billion Euros of the corresponding period of the previous year. EU's export to Iran had a 44% growth from January to April 2017 compared to the corresponding period of the previous year and reached 144.3 billion Euros. With JCPOA and lifting of sanctions, EU's imports from Iran had a dramatic growth with Italy topping the chart of importers. While Italy had imported just 121 million Euros in the first quarter of 2016, this experienced an 8.2-fold increase in the first four months of 2017 to a 1 billion mark (Vaez, 2018: 1-2).

In the same period, Iran-EU trade relations significantly improved. The most important points negotiated between Iran's President of Customs Administration and EU's Director General for Customs and Tax were related to Electronic Information Exchanges, authorized economic actors, R&E, countering drug trafficking and customs irregularities (Erlanger, 2018: 67-69).

Political and Security Relations: In July 2015, European Council on Foreign Relations published a report titled "Engagement with Iran: A European Agenda". While proposing high-level engagements with Iran regarding regional security objectives, the report states that "the JCPOA gives policymakers the liberty to step out of the nuclear-centric vision on Iran and to highlight areas in which Europe can benefit from engaging with Tehran, notably on regional security. Difficult though it may be, to make the greatest contribution towards establishing regional

order, Europe should distance itself from taking sides in regional struggles and allow for maximum flexibility in policy choices by considering the option of actively dealing with Iran where this best serves European security". The strategic document of "EU's Post-JCPOA Strategy Regarding Iran" which has been drafted by European Parliament's Foreign Relations Committee and dictates the EU's strategy regarding post-JCPOA Iran sees JCPOA as the foundation of political talks between Iran and the EU. Federica Mogherini's trip to Iran on April 16, 2016 is assessed within the framework of creation of firm economic bonds with Iran to access its domestic market. In European Parliament's Road Map for the EU's future relations with Iran, the European Council's decision to lift the sanctions in the wake of JCPOA has been mentioned as factor in renewed EU-Iran participation (Colleau, 2017: 18-21).

The EU's joint foreign policy in the ME is based on a number of general security and economic policies along with countering US unilateralism. Security is one of such interests. Iran and the EU share a number of concerns about some places in the world. Some believe that in post-JCPOA world, the parties should not be just concerned about their bilateral relations. Rather, they should as well address the regional security (Stanzel, 2016: 8-9).

Combating terrorism is another important ground for cooperation. Emergence of ISIS in the region was a challenge for West Asia up to a certain time. With aggravation of clashes in Syria, refugees' march toward Europe and execution of terrorist operations in some European capitals such as Paris, the alarm bell was ringed for the EU. It is obvious from statements of Western officials that resolution of regional crises without Iran is out of question and thus they are seeking cooperation with Iran in this regard. The interface of EU-Iran security and political cooperation lies in countering the expansion and influence of extremism. Rouhani's administration believes in security for all actors (Schumacher, 2015: 45-47).

To strike balance against the US, Iran has shown inclination to the EU. This has been the case in Iran's policy from the very

inception of I.R.I. However, it is not realistic to expect too much from Europe when Iran challenges the US. As a matter of fact, European came up with the idea of a union after WW2 thanks to the right security atmosphere created by the US. For this reason, Europe will never lock horns with the US on account of Iran. Rather, Europe has been acting like a US proxy at some points; the EU's interventions in Chechen, Caucuses, Valley of the Kings and the ME peace process have been proxy interventions or in assistance to the US plans (Erlanger, 2018: 1-2).

IV. The US Role

Absence of any political will on the part of the US and the US to employ diplomacy in dealing with Iran's nuclear program has been glaring in recent years.

The US has had a limited involvement in nuclear negotiations with UK, France and Germany practically mediating Iran-US talks. This does negate any EU interest in such negotiations. Rather, an acceptable agreement is concluded when those refraining from negotiating with each other engage in bilateral talks (Dobbins 2006: 21).

Since Iran epitomizes Islamic fundamentalism, the EU is concerned that Iran may transfer nuclear technology to other regional countries, something that may vigorously challenge most of the regional and international principles and practices. Politically speaking, it seems that the primary reason behind US & EU opposition to Iran's nuclear program is not just their genuine fear of Iran's deviation from international regimes for prevention of WMD proliferation, but also concerns about Iran's breach of the new international order envisioned by global liberal democracy values, Iran's support of Islamic movements in the region like Hamas and Hezbollah, its prevention of institutionalization of political stability in Lebanon, interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan as the new Western security ventures, expansion of the so-called Islamic fundamentalism and putting at peril the status quo through adoption of revisionist policies. For

Europe, Iran is similar to Germany at the turn of 20th century: too big to manage to create balance and yet too small to become a hegemonic power. EU believes that Iran has no friend in the world and is neighbored by troublesome states (Fallahi 2008, 191). For Europeans, Iran is a faltering regime and thus any instability or abrupt changes in its ruling system may lead to the loss of government's control over nuclear weapons and installations. They also see Iran's nuclear activities as a threat to Israel's existential security and thus are pushing for a concrete guarantee from Iran. This is why they don't wish the progress of a country's nuclear program regardless of its adherence to NPT. Furthermore, they hold that the ME is a sensitive region and Iran's possible plans to develop military nuclear capability could trigger an arms race in this volatile region which is a serious trouble for the international community (Meier, 2005).

Broadly speaking, Iran's bid for nuclear technology has prompted convergence in great powers' relations, EU-US in particular, which otherwise were diverging for a range of issues like Iraq. Both sides stress the necessity of pressuring Iran in an attempt to stop its nuclear programs, abandoning its uranium enrichment and complete observation of NPT provisions. However, there are still disagreements between the two in connection to Iran's nuclear program. While EU believes Iran deserves beneficial engagements as an agent of regional stability and an important actor in regional equations, US sees Iran's access to nuclear energy a danger and a threat to both regional and global peace and security and hence calls for action against it. As opposed to the US, the EU acknowledges Iran's right to peaceful nuclear energy and believes that Iran's decision making could be better influenced through prioritizing economic incentives and shunning coercive policies. It thus prefers political tools and diplomatic efforts to the US preventive policies. In general, it could be claimed that Iran's nuclear case presented an opportunity for the EU and the US to heal the rift induced by the occupation of Iraq (Dehshiri, 2004, 82, 87-88). The EU and the US share the

same interest and approach to nuclear weapons proliferation and Iran's nuclear case, yet their methodologies and tactics are not the same. To save its convergence prospects as also its trans-Atlantic ties, the EU needs to resolve Iran's case in a manner to A. lend international recognition to EU foreign policy, B. Not counter the US foreign policy as a characteristic of its independent European policy and be its supplementary instead (Div Salaar, 2005, 156-157).

In a new strategic environment and enjoying different characteristics in comparison to the past, the EU is thinking of advancing a European view in global political arena, playing a role befitting its standing in the international system and pursuing the policy of equal status with that of the US which may not necessarily lead to convergence and harmony with the latter. The EU's pursuit of an independent security-defense policy outside the NATO framework could be construed with such a mentality. The EU-US relations divergence and convergence dimensions are primarily fed by their respective interests and different roles they play in international relations. In spheres of shared or parallel interests or where an international role should be played, a stronger tendency for convergence and cooperation is noted in the EU - US relations. However, where there exist conflicts of interests or national roles are involved, divergence and competition come to the fore. There has been trans-Atlantic convergence-oriented cooperation between the EU and the US in strategic policies such as security and political fields that are driven by their international roles. Yet, their ways and/or means of meeting the goals may differ. However, in economic and cultural fields which are mostly reinforced by their national roles and accordingly possess weaker sensitivity and relevance, these two run a competition for stronger regional integration.

The experience of the past few years reveals no satisfactory results for Iran in orientation towards development of its relations with the EU. European countries have always been trying to secure concessions from both sides of the dispute, i.e. Iran and the

US. They have used Iran as an ace in their dealings with the US. Although Iran tends to wield European countries as a counterweight against the US, the EU prevailing conditions hinder any individual venture by the members. Furthermore, in view of the EU's willingness to establish relations with the US, there is this opportunity for the EU to gain more leverage in international equations such as the case of Iran while cooperating and aligning with the US. In other words, despite a number of trade rivalries, differing political tactics and the EU's stronger emphasis on issues such as human rights and democracy, they share the same tactics and principles. The prime example has been the alignment of the EU's development of views concerning Iran's nuclear case in recent years and its cooperation with the US (Rostami, Ahmadian and Karimi, 2019, 246-247).

The biggest EU-US disagreements broke out during Trump's reign over the US in NATO summit (25 May, 2017) as well as G7 group meeting (27 May, 2017). The biggest issue in connection to NATO relates to the spending in this organization on which Trump took a strong, unfriendly tone while addressing EU and NATO's senior representative. As regards G7, Paris Agreement was the bone of contention between Trump and G7 members. In 2015, G7 reached an agreement on countering global warming and green house-induced climate change which came to be known as Paris Agreement. Trump had fundamental differences with other G7 member about the agreement. He believed that not only this agreement would introduce stringent economic restrictions for the US citizens, but also could not result into any environmental improvements. In the end, he withdrew the US from this agreement a week after the summit (Shokouhi, 2017, 1).

One week to the presidential elections of 2016, Trump announced in annual meeting of AIPAC: his top priority would be scrapping the JCPOA if he won the election. In his speech, Trump ripped through the nuclear deal and called it a disaster for the US and Israel (Mark, 2017: 1). However, in view of its interests in Iran, the EU has a firm will to implement the deal. European

countries, France in particular, have relied on the deal to enter Iran's market and utilize the numerous opportunities of investing in Iran and strike further trade deals (Yousefi, 2017: 1).

Conclusion

Although Iran and the EU share interests in fields of energy, countering a unipolar order and resolution of the ME crises, a number of factors triggered a decline in the EU's relations with Iran from 2005 to 2008 and subsequent pressures of this union on Iran. Despite the fact that internal development and changes inside the EU and transition of power in Iran have played an effective role in this rift, it seems that the US pressure on the EU members has been the strongest factor. This has been the case while Iran and the EU members have tried to prevent further deepening of this division. However, the events of recent years could have further strained the EU-Iran relations. Due to interruptions in discourse making in all fields of Iran-EU foreign relations, it seems that these two important actors have not utilized the available opportunities in political terms with significant impacts on their bilateral commercial and economic ties. Naturally, lack of appropriate grounds for promotion of political discourses has led to wastage of economic drivers and stabilizers with subsequent damage to both parties. In view of peaks and troughs witnessed in relations of these two important actors, strengthening of diplomatic stabilizers are suggested for production of political rapport which could lay the foundation for opening a new chapter of economic and trade initiatives across the diplomatic discourse-making sphere.

The EU still endeavors to improve its relations with the US and would not miss any chance to strengthen such relations in line with its strategic reason. Preserving the JCPOA and at the same time committing to sound trans-Atlantic relation would best serve the EU interests. The EU does not seem to have any intention of revisiting the deal even if the US were to take a harder line on the JCPOA.

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