

IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM (2013-PRESENT). EVOLUTION

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ABSTRACT: *THIS PAPER SEEKS TO PROVIDE INSIGHT INTO THE EVOLUTION OF IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAM, FORM THE MOMENT THE EUROPEAN UNION WAS INVOLVED IN THIS ISSUE AS THE MAIN NEGOTIATOR AND THE CHANGES THAT HAVE OCCURED SINCE THE INSTAURATION OF THE NEW PRESIDENT HASSAN ROUHANI. IRAN WANTED THE „NUCLEAR COUNTRY STATUS A LONG TIME. AFTER 2000, HOWEVER ITS AMBITIOUS HAVE BEGUN TO ALARM THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY BECAUSE OF ITS REFUSAL TO ACCEPT IAEA INSPECTIONS. EUROPEAN UNION BECAME INVOLVED IN THIS ISSUE TO DEMONSTRATE THE VALUE OF DIPLOMACY RATHER THAN A POSSIBLE MILITARY ATTACK BY THE US OR ISRAEL. THIS ARTICLE FOCUSES ON FACTS THAT HAPPEND IN RECENT YEARS AND IN PARTICULAR ON THE NEGICIATIONS THAT TOOK PLACE AFTER THE REGIME CHANGE IN TEHERAN.*

KEY WORDS: IRAN, NUCLEAR PROGRAM, EUROPEAN UNION, NEGOTIATIONS, JOINT PLAN OF ACTION.

INTRODUCTION

Iran's controversial nuclear program took birth in 1957, with the signing of a cooperation agreement with the United States under the aegis of the program „Atoms for Peace under command of the Shah Reza Pahlavi. With the signing of this agreement, the US has agreed to assist Iran in the nuclear field, and in 1960 Iran even get a nuclear reactor from United States. In 1968, Iran signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the United States offered Iran enriched uranium as fuel for the operation of the reactor. In the '70s, more and more European countries like France and Germany have announced their intention to collaborate with Iran. This is also the period in which appears the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran.

Even if the policy of the Shah was a pacifist one, the Western states suspected even then that Iran wanted to obtain a nuclear weapon. Between 1975-1979 the relations between US and Iran started to get worse United States used their veto right to prevent Iran to reprocess american nuclear fuel, also trying to convince France and Germany not to provide Iran, assistance in this field. US quickly changed policy towards Iran's nuclear program for two reasons: "India has tested its peaceful nuclear program in 1974 which has alarmed the

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international community and the fact that Iran's nuclear program was sufficiently developed that could be used to build a nuclear weapon"².

US feared that Iran could acquire nuclear weapons, especially if the other states in the region will have. Over time, Iran's nuclear program has gone through various phases, from a slowdown of the program between 1979-1988 to an acceleration of the uranium enrichment programs after 2000. In 2003, states suspicions regarding Iran's nuclear activities were confirmed when it was revealed that Iran has followed numerous steps to develop a modern and complex nuclear program. European states have tried to solve the crisis in a diplomatic manner, the European Union was the main actor in the process of negotiations with Iran. United States Organization played its part in a new approach to the Iranian issue by imposing sanctions that affect the state's economy, so that Iran be forced to abandon its uranium enrichment program and to provide transparency on its nuclear program. Although the two approaches were different, they have reached different points, none reached the expected result. In front of this negotiations, Iran has succumbed a period, but quickly passed to its rigid attitude, not accepting further negotiations with the European Union for a long period of time.

In the last months of Ahmadinejad's regime, were held meetings with the Iranian leaders and the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) officials, with the purpose to convince Iran to submit to investigations relating to its nuclear program. Even if the discussions were intense they have not completed the signing of any document although negotiations last already for a long period of time. In June 2013, President Ahmadinejad is replaced by Hassan Rouhani, known for his moderation. With the change of regime in Tehran, appears a new hope for the international community regarding the resolution of this long-standing problem, Rouhani saying that Iran's nuclear program will continue, but willing to be more transparent in this regard than its predecessor.

EUROPEAN UNION – MAIN NEGOTIATOR IN IRAN'S NUCLEAR FILE (2003-2013)

In 2003, the International Atomic Energy Agency accused Iran that it has not complied with its obligations as a member of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty because it has not reported to the Agency its activities regarding utilisation of nuclear materials. In this case, the European Union has shown its availability to act promptly, in cooperation with other international actors. In June 2003 the European Union adopted the „Declaration on Non-proliferation" and in the same year, in December adopts "European strategy against weapons of mass destruction" which was a common position of the European Union States, regarding the international security problems. Adopting this strategy influenced Union in its involvement in the Iranian nuclear file. The European Union became the main negotiator in this nuclear file in 2003, being represented by Germany, France and Britain (EU-3), who all sent a letter to Iran in September 2003 by offering to help Iran in its nuclear program if it accepts to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency. In October of that year, the three representatives of the Union have signed together with Iran the „Declaration from Teheran" in which he pledged to stop uranium enrichment. Also Iran has engaged to sign an Additional Protocol with the Agency, while European States have admitted that Iran has the right to a peaceful nuclear program and promised that "will cooperate with Iran to promote security and stability in the region including the establishment a zone without weapons of

² Saira Khan, *Iran and Nuclear Weapons: Protracted Conflict and Proliferation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 49.

mass destruction in the Middle East in accordance with the objectives of the United Nations”³.

Unlike the United States, who wanted sanctions on Iran, the European Union has shown a softer position regarding this nuclear program. Immediately after signing the “Declaration from Teheran”, Iran has sent to IAEA documents regarding nuclear activities that took place until then. Once with the Conservatives winning the election in 2004, Iran's political environment changes, also than the Atomic Energy Agency discovers new elements of the nuclear program. Is elected as leader the conservative Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a person slightly willing for concessions especially in favor for europeans, so in 2005 it is calling for a restart of the uranium enrichment process. Also in 2004 is signed the “Paris Agreement” between Iran and EU-3 group which suspends uranium enrichment program, during which the accent was on diplomatic negotiations. In 2006, Iran refuses to respect the Additional Protocol, and to answer IAEA about future nuclear activities and those carried out in the past.

In 2006, the European Union offered Iran nuclear cooperation through “recognition of Iran's right to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, cooperation with Iran in developing a modern nuclear energy program based on generation light water reactors, the Union would help Iran with nuclear waste, providing fuel legally and support for Iran in the process of regaining the confidence of other international actors”⁴. In 2008, the European Union has updated proposals made to Iran in 2006, the aim of this new proposal is to clarify some aspects of the 2006 offer. Both offers imply support of the Union in building a new modern reactor for "light water". This last proposal comes with the amendment that Iran's nuclear program would be treated in the same manner as any other program of a non-nuclear country member of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, after the trust will be restored. Iranian nuclear file back sharply media attention in November 2011 when the International Atomic Energy Agency released a public report pointing out the fact that Iran is close to producing a nuclear weapon which contributed to intensifying tensions in the area. „Until then, both the US special services, and, in large part, the Israeli ones, appreciated that Iran, following his clandestine nuclear program, could reach the final - producing atomic weapons within a few years”⁵. So, Israel and United States began to consider a military attack that will end the nuclear program. This threat caused a sharp reaction from Iran that threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz, hoping this would increase oil prices, thus alleviating, the economic damage caused by the international sanctions imposed until then. Following these threats from Iran, US Navy ships entered the Strait of Hormuz, but this did not trigger a military response from Iran. It seems however that this threat of closing the strait was accompanied by military exercises in nearby waters „which amounts to a warning that a military attack on Iran would result in blocking petrol supply of planet's giants - China, Japan”⁶. Washington adopts new sanctions against Iran, calling for the UN Security Council to discuss a new resolution in this purpose. So through sanctions counted the US decision to suspend transactions with companies that use for payment Iranian Central Bank offices. Thus it is expected that large buyers of petrol will give up iranian source and they will continue

³ International Atomic Energy Agency, *Statement by the Iranian Government and Visiting EU Foreign Ministers*, accessed April 23, 2015,

http://www.iaea.org/newscenter/focus/iaeairan/statement_iran21102003.shtml.

⁴ European Union's Council, *Eu-Iran. Basic Facts*, accessed April 23, 2015,

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/EU-IRAN_Basic_facts_April_2009.pdf .

⁵ Andrei H. Ionescu, *UE: un actor cu o noua agendă în Mideast?*, accessed April 22, 2015,

<http://www.cseea.ro/publicatii/view/brief-analysis/ue-un-actor-cu-o-noua-agenda-in-mideast-1>.

⁶ Andrei H. Ionescu, *UE: un actor cu o noua agendă în Mideast?*, accessed April 22, 2015,

<http://www.cseea.ro/publicatii/view/brief-analysis/ue-un-actor-cu-o-noua-agenda-in-mideast-1>.

relations with US. Iran's income will decrease significantly in case that this sanction will work and Iran's economic situation will get worse.

The European Union joined the promoted sanction by USA, only Russia and China have expressed doubts about using this new resolution. On 22 January 2012, the foreign ministers of the 27 European Union countries have decided application of an embargo on new oil contracts with Iran and existing ones should be closed by 1 July 2012. Catherine Ashton, EU Foreign Minister said that this measure aims to force Iran to take seriously the international community's demands and to accept negotiations. Also, the European Union requested Russia and China to join sanctions imposed by Brussels. However this move made by the European Union had the desired effect. On January 26, Tehran has declared that it accepts the negotiations and is ready to receive visit from the International Atomic Energy Agency experts. It is obvious that if Iran will not obey to Agency control the European Union will join Israel and the United States in finding solutions for peaceful resolution of this conflict.

The negotiations on 5 and 6 April 2013 in Kazakhstan between Iran and the six major world powers (US, Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany) have not produced any agreement between the parts. Catherine Ashton, head of European diplomacy led negotiations saying that the parts are still far from reaching a consensus. The six major world powers insists „that Iran reduce stocks and production of higher purity enriched uranium, fearing that Tehran would divert from producing nuclear fuel for the production of material used to manufacture the core of nuclear warheads”⁷. Iran believes it has the right to enrich uranium because it does not intend to build nuclear weapons and it has request in exchange for all concessions made, taming more sanctions.

CATHERINE ASHTON – EU FOREIGN POLICY CHIEF AND IRAN’S NUCLEAR FILE (2013 - OCTOBER 2014)

After the presidential elections of June 2013 and the instauration of a new Iranian government, Iran and the EU-3 group had decided to continue negotiations on the Iranian nuclear file, aiming to find a diplomatic solution. In October 2013, in Geneva took place negotiations between Iran and P5+1 representatives: „At the end of the talks, the parties release a joint statement describing the meetings as «substantive and forward looking». The statement also says that Iran presented a new proposal that the P5+1 carefully considered as an important contribution to the talks”⁸. This meeting is followed by another meeting in Geneva in 7 and 10 November, but the involved parts fail this time to, to reach a consensus. However, on November 23, 2013, Iranian minister Javad Zari and European negotiator, Catherine Ashton signed an agreement called the „Joint Plan of Action” which refers to the steps that each side will follow for a period of six months, in a first phase of the agreement. So Iran was obliged to: „convert half of its stockpile of uranium enriched to 20 percent to oxide form and downblend the remainder to an enrichment level of no more than five percent; suspend production of uranium enriched to above five percent; no further advances in nuclear activities at the Natanz Fuel Enrichment Plant, the enrichment plant at Fordow and the Arak heavy water reactor; convert uranium enriched up to five percent produced during the six months to oxide form when the construction of the conversion facility is completed; no new enrichment facilities; research and development practices, including on enrichment, will continue under IAEA safeguards, providing information to the IAEA on plans for

⁷ ***, „Noile negocieri pe tema programului nuclear iranian au eşuat” în *Cotidianul*, accessed April 22, 2015, <http://www.cotidianul.ro/noile-negocieri-pe-tema-programului-nuclear-iranian-au-esuat-210686/>.

⁸ Arms Control Association, *Timeline of Nuclear Diplomacy with Iran*, accessed May 11, 2015, <http://www.armscontrol.org/factsheet/Timeline-of-Nuclear-Diplomacy-With-Iran>.

nuclear sites and the Arak reactor, allow daily IAEA access to Natanz and Fordow, and allow managed access to centrifuge workshops and uranium mines and mills”⁹. Also actions of international community represented by the P5 + 1 group included: „no new nuclear-related sanctions from the UN Security Council, the EU and the U.S; pause efforts to further reduce Iran’s oil sales and partial repatriation of frozen Iranian assets from oil sales; suspension of U.S. and EU sanctions on petrochemical exports and gold and precious metals; suspension of U.S. sanctions on Iran’s auto industry; supply and installation of spare parts for Iranian civil airplanes, including repairs and safety inspections; establish a financial channel for humanitarian goods using Iran’s oil revenues that are frozen abroad, which can also be used for tuition payments for Iranian student abroad and payment of Iran’s UN dues and increase of the EU thresholds for non-sanctioned trade with Iran”¹⁰. In December of that year, in Geneva, the discussions between Iran and P5 + 1 group regarding the implementation of the Joint Plan of Action continues.

The beginning of 2014 looks very promising for the development of the nuclear program because it announces the implementation of the Joint Plan of Action, which will start from January. Also starting late February new negotiations are made in Vienna to outline a comprehensive agreement. The results of these meetings are visible in early June of 2014, when the general director of the IAEA, Yukya Amano, said that Iran keeps with its part of the deal, neutralizing almost completely the 20% enriched uranium stock. In early July, representatives of the P5 + 1 announced that negotiations will extend until November, when it would take place final agreement. On 24 November 2014, Iran and P5 + 1 group announces that negotiations will be extended, because there was visible progress on the important nuclear issues and both sides are optimistic in finding a solution that both sides agree. November is significant also because the High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy and the main negotiator in the Iranian nuclear file, Catherine Ashton is replaced by Federica Mogherini.

FEDERICA MOGHERINI – EU FOREIGN POLICY CHIEF AND IRAN’S NUCLEAR FILE (NOVEMBER 2014 -PRESENT)

End of 2014 and the first three months of 2015 are marked by numerous meetings and negotiations regarding the Iranian nuclear file evolution. In early April of 2015, it's announced an agreement on the general framework, which outlines the parameters of a nuclear agreement. Also, Iran and P5 + 1 group agreed to continue meetings for establish a final agreement by the end of June. Through the key points of the agreement signed in April stands¹¹:

1. Iran has agreed to reduce by approximately two-thirds its installed centrifuges;
2. Iran has agreed to not enrich uranium over 3.67 percent for at least 15 years;
3. Iran has agreed to reduce its current stockpile of about 10,000 kg of low-enriched uranium to 300 kg of 3.67% for 15 years;
4. Iran has agreed to not build any new facilities for the purpose of enriching uranium for 15 years;
5. Iran will convert its facility at Fordow so that it is no longer used to enrich uranium;
6. Iran will only enrich uranium at the Natanz facility, with only 5,060 IR-1 first-generation

⁹ Arms Control Association, *History of Official Proposals on the Iranian Nuclear Issue*, accessed May 11, 2015, http://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Iran_Nuclear_Proposals.

¹⁰ Arms Control Association, *History of Official Proposals on the Iranian Nuclear Issue*, accessed May 11, 2015, http://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Iran_Nuclear_Proposals.

¹¹ CNN, *Parameters of the tentative Iran nuclear deal*, accessed May 12, 2015, <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/04/02/world/iran-nuclear-deal-parameters/index.html>.

- centrifuges for ten years;
7. The IAEA will have regular access to all of Iran's nuclear facilities, including to Iran's enrichment facility at Natanz and its former enrichment facility at Fordow, and including the use of the most up-to-date, modern monitoring technologies;
 8. Iran will receive sanctions relief, if it verifiably abides by its commitments;
 9. All past UN Security Council resolutions on the Iran nuclear issue will be lifted simultaneous with the completion, by Iran, of nuclear-related actions addressing all key concerns.

In 20 of June, IAEA Director, Yukiya Amano meets U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry to discuss the ongoing negotiations between Iran and the EU-3 group. The meeting took place in Vienna and was part of the IAEA's engagement with Iran and EU-3 to help make a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action technically sound¹². The beginning of July looks promising because IAEA Director, Yukiya Amano travelled to Teheran for meetings with President Hassan Rouhani and the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, Ali Shamkhani. „The purpose of the visit was to advance work towards the resolution of all outstanding issues regarding Iran's nuclear program, including clarification of possible military dimensions. I believe that both sides have a better understanding on some ways forward, though more work will be needed”¹³.

CONCLUSION

Iran's nuclear capabilities have been the subject of research for a long time. Although the government in Tehran supported for a long time that its nuclear program is peaceful, it is still incomprehensible the refusal to allow IAEA inspections and the uranium enrichment action. After many years of negotiation, diplomacy effort was rewarded in April this year by signing an agreement that aims to help solve this pressing problem for the international community. However this deal is not final, the final details would have been set up by the end of June. Although this agreement seems to bring a relief within the international community, regarding Iran's nuclear program, it is seen with skepticism by the United States and especially by Israel, which considers Iran is not trustworthy and should not be allowed to use nuclear energy even for peaceful purposes.

¹² IAEA, *IAEA Director General and U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry meet on Iran Negotiations*, accessed July 8, 2015, <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/news/iaea-director-general-and-us-secretary-state-john-kerry-meet-iran-negotiations>.

¹³ Yukiya Amano, *IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano's Statement on visit to Iran*, accessed July 8, 2015, <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/pressreleases/iaea-director-general-yukiya-amanos-statement-visit-iran>.

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