

Iran: Remarks by the High Representative/Vice-President Josep Bo



Check against delivery!

I thank the European Parliament for its ongoing concern about the situation in Iran, including the recent worrying Human Rights related developments.

Iran is in the middle of a difficult period. The COVID-19 is affecting the country severely, with more than 3,000 new infections every day, nearing half a million in total, and at least 27,000 deaths. The COVID-19 crisis is further deepening Iran's existing economic difficulties. Following the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the so-called JCPOA, Iran had legitimate expectations that this "nuclear deal" would result in more concrete economic benefits.

Yet, after the regrettable US departure from the agreement and re-instatement of severe sanctions, the overall economic figures speak for themselves; the International Monetary Fund is predicting a 10% drop in GDP this year, [after a] 8,5 drop last year; unemployment is at 16%; [within the past year] the Iranian rial has lost almost half its value towards the US dollar; trade with the EU has decreased. In addition, Iran is experiencing shortages of important humanitarian items like personal protective equipment and medicine that could help in fighting COVID-19. There are severe shortages of all capacities to fight the COVID-19.

As European Union, we were quick to provide humanitarian support, with a [humanitarian] air bridge, and we keep strongly advocating – together with the UN Secretary General [António Guterres] that sanctions must not impede humanitarian trade. Together with European Union Member States we also keep looking at ways to encourage more legitimate trade between the EU and Iran, including through INSTEX [the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges]. But we need to do more.

These difficulties have also had a political impact in Iran, not least at the parliamentary election earlier this year; we have seen a strengthening of

those opposed to the nuclear deal, who are distrustful of the West and who do not support diplomacy and engagement. Together with our European and international partners, we are working hard to make sure that diplomacy with Iran continues to be possible.

We have also witnessed several deeply concerning human rights developments recently. This includes the treatment of Nasrin Sotoudeh and the many other political prisoners who remain imprisoned, whose health is at risk and should be released on humanitarian grounds, or at least have prompt access to medical assistance if they require it.

We also [condemned publicly the execution of Iranian wrestler Navid Afkari](#) and called on the Iranian authorities to investigate allegations that he was tortured in detention. We underline to all our partners, and not just Iran, that the perpetrators of such acts must be held accountable.

We continue to engage the Iranian authorities on their distressing practice of arbitrarily detaining European Union-Iranian dual nationals. We acknowledge the temporary release of French citizen Fariba Adelkhah, no individual should be used as a pawn and I want to once again urge the Iranian authorities to cease this policy.

Madam President, Honourable Members,

Let me finish with some remarks on the nuclear agreement. I want to be clear: As Coordinator – because the High Representative acts as coordinator of the JCPOA – I will continue to do everything possible to ensure the preservation and full implementation of the nuclear deal by all parties. Why is this so important? Because it is in our very own European security interest. And because the agreement continues to deliver. Without the nuclear deal, Iran could have developed a nuclear weapon by now with all the security implications for the region and beyond.

Of course, I am very concerned about Iran's reduced implementation of its JCPOA nuclear commitments following the US withdrawal from the agreement two years ago. And I do believe that full implementation of the nuclear deal by Iran and the other parties remains crucial to our efforts to preserve it.

However, we should not forget that even though the amount of nuclear material Iran possesses today is more than it had two years ago, it is still far less than the ten tons of enriched uranium that Iran possessed before the agreement. And we know that this is thanks to the JCPOA: Iran is the most monitored country in the world by the International Atomic Energy Agency, with now almost 400 inspections per year. If we were to lose the agreement, we would lose such critical information about the nuclear programme, too.

During recent weeks, a great amount of attention has been devoted to attempts by the United States to bring back the United Nations Iran sanctions. Here I want to be very clear also, once more: bringing back these sanctions would have meant the end of the JCPOA. 13 members of the Security Council, including all European members, rejected this approach and underlined the importance to keep the agreement in place – this way supporting the

understanding that the US is no longer part of the JCPOA because they freely decided to withdraw from it. They were also very clear that – after leaving the agreement in 2018 – the United States was not in a position to initiate the so-called ‘snap back’ process of bringing back United Nations sanctions under the UN Security Council resolution 2231. As JCPOA Coordinator, I thus want to re-iterate that all sanctions lifting commitments under the agreement remain in place.

I will personally continue to remain engaged on all of these issues, knowing that you are being criticized by both parts when you take this stance, and I count on the strong backing of this Parliament and the Council to promote a holistic approach to Iran that takes into account the different facets of our bilateral relationship. Engagement with Iran on all these issues remains in the European Union’s vital strategic interest, and that is why we are approaching the issue the way we do.

Thank you.

Link to the video: <https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-195823>

Closing remarks

Thank you President, it has been a busy morning. We have been here for 4 four hours and we are reaching the end of these intense debates about three very important issues. Many things have been said, I agree with many of them. And I could say exactly what Mr [Michael] Gahler has said at the end – the worst thing would be Iran becoming nuclear. Thanks to this [nuclear] deal, it is not nuclear. Other Members [of the European Parliament] have said the same thing, I cannot mention all of them.

To try to keep the JCPOA alive – although, as Mr [Reinhard] Bütikofer has said, it is very weak, it is not in a very good shape because the withdrawal of the US is something that jeopardises its existence and continuity. But to keep the JCPOA [alive] although in a reduced regime, is not contradictory with the importance that we have to give to the situation of human rights in Iran. I know that this is something that the entire Parliament is very much concerned with and I can assure you that we will continue working to put in front of the Iranian authorities our concerns, our rejection of the executions, and the tensions that have been mentioned here today. We will do that in close collaboration with the German Embassy in Tehran, which is currently acting as our local representation since we do not have a European Union Delegation on the ground.

And Mr Bütikofer is also right, we have to look further. Whatever is going to happen in the US after the next election... it is not sure that the JCPOA will resist. We have to look for a new agreement – is it possible? Remember how difficult it was to reach this agreement, how many years of tough work were required? To rebuild the agreement in order to adapt it to the new circumstances and even enlarging it would be good, if possible. It would depend very much on the political landscape in January next year.

In the meantime, about the arms embargo, I want to stress that we, Europeans,

will continue to keep our arms embargo in place. The comprehensive arms embargo of the European Union, not related to the JCPOA, will continue into 2023. But we cannot say that we fight to keep the JCPOA alive and at the same time impose an arms embargo related to the JCPOA itself. On that, I think we cannot share the position of the US, as did not 13 Members of the United Nations Security Council.

All in all, we are trying to do our best to increase our trade with Iran. It is very difficult because the American sanctions are very powerful, but the Iran deal is not just a nuclear deal – it is a nuclear deal on one side and an economic deal on the other. And one thing goes with the other. We cannot pretend [to ask] Iran to fulfil all the nuclear obligations if at the same time they do not get any kind of reward from the economic side. This is a delicate balance, and let us try to work on two things at the same time: the nuclear agreement and human rights. We continue fighting to keep the nuclear agreement alive and working, and at the same time, we will continue working to make the Iranian authorities aware that the respect of human rights is a sine qua non condition for us to engage with them.

And in both things I need the support of the European Parliament, for a realistic approach to one of the most important problems for our security. Because without the JCPOA, today Iran would be a nuclear power and then we would be in a completely different scenario, in a completely different situation. I think that this achievement of the European Diplomacy, – which took a lot [of] efforts from a lot of people, from Javier Solana [former High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and Secretary General of the Council of the European] to Ms Federica Mogherini [former High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission], it deserves to be preserved. It deserves to be continued, to facilitate a non-nuclear Iran. And it gives us also leverage to engage with Iran on these other very important issues, such as human rights, that I know the Members of the [European] Parliament are very much attached to, as I am. You can count on the work of the European External Action Service engaging on these issues. The two of them can go in parallel, one thing does not prevent the other.

Thank you very much Members of the Parliament for your support and for this long and moving session.

Link to the video: <https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-195825>