



**COUNCIL OF
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Statement to the European Parliament

on Iran by

Javier SOLANA,

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Javier SOLANA took part in the debate on Iran at this afternoon's plenary sitting of the European Parliament. He gave a wide-ranging address on the importance of Iran as a key player in the Middle East and the current political situation there. He outlined the potential areas in which the EU and Iran could work together and the obstacles that prevent a constructive partnership at the present time. The following is an edited summary of Mr SOLANA's statement:

"Mr President, Honourable Members of Parliament,

Iran is a key country in the Middle East. It is important in strategic terms. It is also important as a regional actor. We would like to have a constructive relationship with Iran. But there are many difficulties.

Iran is also a vibrant society, full of talented people. It has an exceptionally high proportion of women graduates. Persian is one of the major languages of the internet, especially for blogs as young people seek a means of self expression.

The political scene in Iran is of interest, as you well know: there are elements of democracy there not present in many other Middle Eastern countries, though the election process still leaves much to be desired. For the Majles elections in March for example, 30 per cent of candidates have been disqualified, with those of reformist tendencies suffering most. Some will have an opportunity to appeal but others will not. Nevertheless an imperfect democracy is better than none and it is right that we should engage with Iranian parliamentarians. I am grateful to the European Parliament for sending a delegation there to meet with colleagues in the Iranian parliament.

Members of this Parliament are also right to be concerned about the rule of law and human rights in Iran. Iran is almost at the bottom of the world press freedom index. It has increased the number of executions. There are unfortunately numerous reports of torture. Such things are unacceptable and only damage Iran's image as a civilised country.

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All of those who campaign for human rights in Iran, for example in the one million signatures campaign for women's rights, deserve our support and admiration. I had the opportunity to meet and talk with Mrs Souhayr Belhassen, President of the International Federation of Human Rights, today. With greater freedom, greater accountability and a more even-handed justice, Iran could be one of the most creative and dynamic societies in the Middle East. The European Union had in the past a human rights dialogue with Iran but since 2006 the Iranians have been unwilling to participate.

But we have many areas of common interest with Iran that are not fully exploited. The most obvious of these is the energy sector. But there is also more we could do together on drug trafficking and against terrorism.

It would be good if we were able to work better with Iran in the region. But for the moment, as you know, it is difficult to see Iran as a constructive partner. In almost every area we seem to find ourselves pursuing different, sometimes contradictory, policies. We want a two-state solution in Palestine. We want Annapolis to work. Iran, by contrast, urged Muslim countries to boycott the Annapolis conference. It is still the only country in the Middle East that does not accept the idea of a two-state solution. It is a key supplier of arms to Hamas. The remarks of President Ahmadinejad concerning Israel and his support for holocaust denial are entirely unacceptable for all of us. Iran also plays a destabilising factor in Lebanon. It is the most important supplier of weapons to Hezbollah. It has also worked with groups pursuing violence in Iraq.

All of these activities make Iran, from our point of view, a troublesome and difficult actor in the Middle East. But it remains one that we need to understand and engage with better. There have been periods of cooperation with Iran, for example in Afghanistan, that have been fruitful and I believe we should continue to seek such opportunities.

As you know, the most important subject of concern is the Iranian nuclear program. Were Iran to develop a weapon this could be a cause of radical instability and danger in the Middle East. It would also be very damaging to the whole non-proliferation system. Even the suspicion that Iran is pursuing a nuclear weapon can destabilise the Middle East. Our objective is to remove those suspicions. In the end this can be done only through a negotiated solution.

It is welcome that Iran is working with the IAEA to deal with some of the so called "Outstanding Issues". The current phase, with Dr El Baradei, in which Iran needs to answer questions about a possible weaponisation programme, and especially other questions relating to contamination, is especially important.

But even if these questions about the past are answered that does not provide the transparency for which we have been asking about Iran's present activities nor its future intentions. Present transparency requires Iran to ratify and implement the Additional Protocol, as we have said many times.

Confidence about its future intentions is more difficult. Supposing Iran did have a weaponisation programme in the past, how can we be sure today that its present enrichment activity is exclusively civil? It is especially difficult to believe this when we see no sign of Iran signing a contract to build a nuclear power plant (apart from Bushehr for which the Russians supply the fuel). All we hear about is enrichment. When I ask representatives of the Iranian government - and you asked the question the other day - what they plan to do with the enriched uranium they are producing, I never get an answer.

The fact is that Iran can develop a civil programme only with assistance of Europe, the USA, Russia or Japan. None of us have a problem with an Iranian civil programme, indeed we are offering to help. But none of us, in the group of six countries plus Japan, will do so unless we are certain that Iran's intentions are exclusively peaceful.

That is why we try continually to get a negotiated solution. So far, unfortunately, we have not been able to succeed. Also, unfortunately, it is impossible to do nothing while Iran continues to ignore resolutions of the IAEA and the UN Security Council. Work is therefore going on in New York on a further resolution. The objective of these resolutions is not to punish Iran but to persuade it to come to the negotiating table. As far as I am concerned, the sooner the better. The European Union and the permanent members of the Security Council are fully united in this and, as you know, we had an important meeting last week

Perhaps I could add one further comment that goes beyond Iran itself. In a world where there is increasing interest in nuclear power we need to find ways of assuring countries that they can obtain nuclear fuel without having to do their own enrichment - which is expensive for them and gives rise to proliferation concerns. I strongly support, myself, the ideas for the creation of international fuel supply assurances, perhaps in the form of a fuel bank. That idea has been put forward by many important figures in the international community. There are many good ideas in this area. I believe the time has come to turn those ideas into action.

Iran is a key country. I have been engaged for years now to bring it back to normal relations with us. We all have to win from that. Iranians and Europeans. I do believe in that. And I will continue relentlessly working for that objective. I think it will benefit the people of Iran and the EU.

Thank you very much."

Following interventions from the floor, Mr SOLANA responded to MEPs' questions and wound up the debate. He outlined the three main areas of concern in relations with Iran which are the human rights situation, the Middle-East peace process and Iran's nuclear programme. There is no possibility of discussing human rights issues with Iran, he said, since Iran withdrew from the human rights dialogue with the EU at the end of 2006. Iran must play a constructive role in the Middle East peace process, along with its Arab neighbours, and support the process. The EU's dual-track strategy with Iran as regards its nuclear development programme remains wholly valid. The best proof of this is that Mr SOLANA met Mr Jalili on 23 January, the day after the meeting of the EU 3 +3 in Berlin at which he was requested to reiterate to Mr Jalili the international community's readiness to enter into negotiations if Iran complies with the UN Security Council's requirements.