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**Statement on recent declarations by
the President of Iran**

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

European Parliament

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Naturally, we must utterly condemn the totally unacceptable remarks about the State of Israel made by the Iranian Head of State, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. President Barroso reacted immediately on behalf of the European Commission by issuing a firm condemnation in the clearest possible terms.

From Hampton Court, the European Council swiftly issued an equally strong declaration. This echoed the outrage and anguish felt by European citizens, the people of Israel, and throughout the world.

Last week, the EU Foreign Ministers further reiterated our collective condemnation of calls for violence and for the destruction of any state. They also concurred to the fact that "such comments cause concern about Iran's role in the region and its future intentions".

Regrettably, this kind of hostile official remarks from Iran are not unique. As I have myself reiterated in public Ahmadi Nejad's statement on Israel was **shocking statement, and completely unacceptable**. Has rightly been condemned in the strongest terms across the International Community.

What is needed is the rebuilding of confidence between the International Community and Iran. **This was just the opposite of what was needed.**

There is a long, ugly string of precedents, at political rallies, military parades and other events, going all the way back to the early years of the revolution. But when they are made in the current delicate climate, by the Head of State himself, in connection with a conference entitled "the World without Zionism", it is time to draw a line and to remind the Iranian President of the responsibilities that come with being a member of the Family of nations.

Nonetheless, the EU has and continues to make its best efforts to engage Iran so as to help create the conditions that would allow for its full reintegration into the international community. This was precisely what my colleague Jàn Figel indicated on the occasion of the debate on Iran held at your plenary session last month.

But it takes two to tango. As a basic pre-requisite, we expect that the Iranian government exercise responsible leadership, both domestically and internationally. Iran has remarkable historical, cultural and geo-political assets, as well as immense natural and human resources. This entails special responsibilities in order to foster peace and stability within a particularly volatile neighbourhood.

On the nuclear track, we still believe that engagement is far preferable to brinkmanship, confrontation and isolation. We support the efforts by United Kingdom, France and Germany, Mr. Solana, and like-minded partners, to bring Iran closer to a more transparent position, including the fullest cooperation with Dr ElBaradei and the IAEA. In this regard, the next meeting of the Board of the IAEA will be crucial.

But this is not the only area where we would expect the Iranian government to deliver. Iran's attitude towards the Middle East Peace process, in particular, is crucial. Indeed, since the launch of our EU-Iran Comprehensive Dialogue - itself the successor of the Critical Dialogue - this has been identified as one of our major issues of concern, along with Weapons of Mass Destruction, terrorism, and Human Rights.

During Mr. Khatami's Presidency, we used this channel of engagement to good effect. Even though Iran did not acknowledge officially the existence of Israel, we could register some positive inflections and, probably, a better appreciation of the whole Middle East equation. In particular, it was stated that Iran would not obstruct the Peace Process and would not pretend to be "more Palestinian than the Palestinians".

The intemperate remarks made by President Ahmadinejad come as a setback. Among the many condemnations it triggered, I was particularly pleased to note that of the Palestinian Authority representative. Indeed, Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat displayed real statesmanship by recalling that the PLO and the Palestinian Authority had recognized the State of Israel, with whom they pursued a Peace Process. I must say that thunderous neo-revolutionary warnings by the Iranian leadership to other Muslim countries not to recognise Israel, seem curiously out of step with the modern world, and may very well backfire.

Over the past months, the EU has invited Iran to reactivate our tracks of dialogue, by holding sessions of both the Comprehensive Dialogue and the Human Rights Dialogue. I strongly hope that Iran will recommit itself to these processes, and seize this opportunity to clarify its position, dispel misunderstandings and start restoring an overall confidence which has been badly damaged by recent remarks.

Although today is not the occasion, one could speak at length about Human rights and the positive expectations that were initially created during the first years of Mr. Khatami's Presidency, and the subsequent negative trend that has regrettably cemented itself. Improvements are badly needed and the EU, obviously, cannot remain silent on the matter. I believe that we should try to build bridges with Iranian people and I prefer to think that not all Iranians identify with the remarks and line taken by their leaders. Freedom of expression and association in Iran is eroding. We should continue to monitor closely the treatment of individual cases, such as that of Akbar Ganji.

But as the Council clearly stated last week, "the evolution of the long-term relationship, avoiding a deterioration, between Iran and Europe will depend on action by Iran to address effectively all the EU's areas of concern". This includes Iran's attitude towards the Middle East Peace Process. The ball is now in the Iranian government's court.

Thank you for your attention.