

## **Iran Sanctions by European Countries the Comparative Analysis of the Performance of the European Union and the US with Islamic Republic of Iran's Nuclear Energy after the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action)**

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**Abstract:** Iran as a developing country is in a certain stage of its social and political history. In addition to unique geographic position of this country, access to the Persian Gulf, domination on the Hormuz important and strategic strait, and coastal water suggesting stable and immutable factors in foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, this country is always looking for playing a key and influential role in the Middle East and in this regard, has better situation than the other countries. Emphasizing on the tangible and intangible national power sources and natural and traditional variables in one hand, and emphasizing on achieving the nuclear energy and software science and their applications in the fields of science and industry on the other hand, are important and challenging subjects worsening the crisis between Iran and U.S. So, the aim of this study is to evaluate the comparative approach of E.U and U.S toward Iran on the nuclear energy after JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action). Based on the studies, it was concluded that the EU and the US have some demands about Iran's nuclear energy, after the JCPOA.

**Keywords:** EU; Iran's nuclear energy; JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action); US

### **Introduction**

Islamic republic of Iran as a regional power which tends to change the relations inside the Middle East and beyond it, during the last three decades, it has been able to play an effective role in the arrangement of power puzzle in the Middle East (Gharayagh Zandi, 2008). It also has had a successful performance in forming behavioral patterns of some actors such as Islamic movements, organizations of liberation, and even some governments. The barriers of Iran and US political relationships, in the first place and more than any other factor refer to the continuity of America's positions against Iran. Factors such as two decades

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economic sanction and the increase of its domain especially at the age of Iran's rebuilding, biased policies and the direct intervention of America in the favor of Iraq at the period of the war, human rights charge against Iran, the convergence request from Europe to impose economic pressure on Iran, forming political and economic chaos in the regions surrounding Iran, tensing up the security atmosphere of Iran, supporting the media war against Iran, and forming supporting coverage to opposite groups of Iran in abroad, being affected by three powerful lobbies means Jewish, reactionary Arab, and militant neo-conservatives in the government have blocked the path of politicians in the field of decision making for détente in the political relationship with America (Ardestani, 2003). Although after the Islamic revolution of Iran, there has been no broad and considerable relationship between Iran and EU at any age and this relationship has had always extreme ups and downs, Iran's nuclear activities are a turning point in the relationship between two parties. Now more than ever, the relationship between Iran and the West especially EU is tied to Iran's nuclear issue and it has hardened the establishment of a normal and balanced relationship. Such a situation takes a lot of energy from both parties and the sanction policies of the EU highly affect the cooperation between them. The file of Iran's nuclear activities is one of the most important variables of understanding the reason of Iran's diplomatic relationship obstruction with the EU. Europe believes that in treating Iran's nuclear activities, the "sanction diplomacy" is more effective and less expensive than "the sanction war option". Iran and European countries have had commercial, cultural, and political relationships from last few centuries and these relationships remained stable even after the Islamic revolution. In recent years, the level of commercial and economic transactions between Iran and Europe had had increased, in one hand because of the Iran's need to import and invest in modern technologies from European countries and on the other hand, because of the Europe's need to Iran's energy resources and domestic market. With arising Iran's nuclear program in 2002, this topic has become the dominant discourse in the European Union and a test for the common foreign and security policy of the EU. Solving the peaceful crisis not only seems necessary for the realization of the common foreign and security policy, but also it could cause the EU's resources in the field of trade and energy to be preserved. But two important points should be considered in the analysis of the relationships between Iran and European countries: first, EU has not an independent identity from its members and no member country can codify foreign policy of the Union by its own. Although mutual relationships with the EU members\_ especially large governments\_ are separately important, the relationships with EU as a whole should not be ignored. Another important point is the variable and the component of the US in the foreign policy of EU. Even though U.S. and EU governments have tactical differences on some issues, the existence of many common benefits and theories between them has been always the cause of convergence between transatlantic powers. The European governments, despite the past two decade's

efforts, have been always failed to adopt a common foreign and security decision without the intervention of the U.S. (Pakfar, 2010).

### **The Background of Iran's Relationship with the U.S. and EU**

Iran's relationship with European countries during the Cold War was mostly defined in economic fields and its strategic dimensions were assigned to the U.S. (Khaloozadeh, 2011a). Following the events of September eleven, and with the change of US's attitude about the international relations and Europe's tendency to adopt a more active role in the foreign field, the emphasis on the field of business changed and replaced with political and security priorities. Since then, the relations between Iran and EU which were indirectly affected by the U.S, led to strategic security topics and subjects. In one hand, after the fall of Saddam and the extensive presence of the U.S. in the Middle East, the relationship of EU with Iran included political and security fields like issue of Iran's nuclear activities. The issue of transparency in Iran's nuclear activities has been always one of the EU's preconditions for developing the relations with Iran, as far as the EU conditioned the economic and commercial contract with Iran to solve the nuclear issue in June 2003 and showed that the EU would use economic and commercial leverages to solve Iran's nuclear program, if necessary. Therefore, Iran's nuclear program became an important aspect in EU's relations with Iran and affected the quality and the quantity of the relations as an independent variable. Following the September 11, 2001, event, the sensitivity, positions, and the behavior of Europeans towards Iran was intensified. One of the main reasons of EU's special sensitivity was US's actions and stimulations at those periods. Europeans in one hand were willing to an equal pressure and force so that with the increase of nuclear proliferation execution power and the clarification of nuclear dossier, Iran would accept the more supervision from EU. On the other hand, they did not tend Iran's dossier to be sent to UN Security Council; because according to EU's belief, the exit of the dossier from the agency means the release of the subject from European management and the start of US's unilateral performance for completing the integrated Middle East project (Bassiri and Mustafa, 2007). The study of EU's behavior shows that the position of the EU has become more severe since the report of ElBaradei, secretary general of the "International Atomic Energy Agency" in the half of 2003, and it has become one of the effective factors in the formation of the international consensus against Iran, the scene that its actors have different situations and powers. So, international advertisement and society did not support Iran's position, but the opposite side (Khaloozadeh, 2011b).

## Iran's Acquisition of Nuclear Energy

Iran's acquisition of the nuclear energy and uranium enrichment and production cause Iran to be added to the list of limited countries that own the nuclear power. Iran's achievement of nuclear energy cause Iranian people's national self-esteem and pride and the reflection of this news cause strong positioning and oppositions European and western countries especially the U.S. The disclosure of Iran's nuclear energy was first revealed by People's Mujahedin of Iran in Willard Hotel in Washington on August 14, 2002. After that C.N.N showed pictures from power stations in Natanz and Arak and accused Iran of making nuclear weapons in this power station. After the reflection of this news and taking positions by media, Mohamed ElBaradei the secretary general of the agency visited Iran and announced that what was happening in Iran was not unexpected and its nuclear program is peaceful. But some countries showed harsh and excusing suggestions until ElBaradei presented a comprehensive report of Iran's nuclear activities. Meanwhile, the U.S. used destructive advertisement against Iran and announced it must adhere to N.P.H treaty and sign the additional protocol without any preconditions (Gharib Abadi, 2005).

Since that date, Iran's nuclear dossier entered political confusions and gained the most sensitivity from the international community about itself. Achieving nuclear energy has been one of Iran's stable policies before and after the Islamic revolution. In 1970, Iran signed the contract of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and for the realization of nuclear energy, it took its first steps with sending students abroad and signing mutual contracts with European.

Iran's effort to achieve nuclear energy has been the subject of debates and discussions and attracted attentions of many of the international communities. Some factors that increase the sensitivity of Iran's nuclear energy achievement include:

- The lack of power resulting from the collapse of the bipolar system of international relations;
- The propagation of global interactions in the field of security because of the September 11 terrorist incidents;
- The gap derived from the invasion of Iraq and US's unilateralism;
- Implementation of America's doctrine which is based on the principle of maintaining America's security in international relations;
- The strategy adopted in the George Bush's presidency;
- Russia's attempts for regaining back the power;
- The concerns about the emergence of regional aggressive powers;
- The new changes of the Middle East and the central Asia which have the international concerns about Iran's nuclear ability and its danger for Israel's security (Mousavian, 2008).

The existing international situation turned Iran's nuclear dossier into the most complicated and vital international political issue after the war with Iraq.

### **Zooming out the Iran's Nuclear Energy**

America's attitude about Iran's nuclear energy is more concentrated on the production of nuclear bomb. Iran's government has emphasized on the peacefulness of nuclear energy and the agency's supervision of nuclear stations many times. Even America's intelligence and espionage sources have emphasized on the peacefulness of Iran's nuclear energy. About 16 America's intelligence agencies through a report on Iran's nuclear program announced that Iran's distance to the stage of a nuclear bomb is a lot and there cannot be seen any military use of their activities.

### **Iran's Position in EU's Foreign Policy**

According to Iran's influence among Middle East countries, central Asia, and countries around the Persian Gulf, Iran has been always under the spotlight of great powers such as EU. Efforts for solving regional crises and forming stability and security have prepared conditions for Iran to always be a potential partner for EU. On the other hand, having a stable relation with Iran help EU to have a better interaction with Middle East countries and as a result, have a better position in the competition with other global powers to realize its goals. Iran's possession of rich energy resources and Europe's effort for diversifying its partners in the field of energy and reducing its dependency on Russia are other factors in Iran's importance in EU's foreign and security policy. Iran's vast market for European goods export is also another factor in the importance of Iran's position.

### **Iran's Sanction by European Countries**

European countries applied political sanctions against different countries since 1980s and sanctions against Iran aimed at preventing the continuation of Iran's nuclear program has been on the agenda of the Union Europe since 2006. In fact, EU uses dual strategies on Iran; one forcing and controlling and the other negotiation. EU avoided punitive measures beyond the Security Council resolutions up to 2010, but during the past two years, it has applied large sanctions against Iran's financial and energy sectors (Tabrizi, & Santini, 2012).

It can be said that EU was suspected about the adoption of punitive approach against Iran during the past years because it believed that political sanctions is a dangerous mean and can harm diplomatic and economic dimensions of the EU's interests.

With US pressure, EU ministers approved a collection of sanctions especially oil sanctions on January 23, 2012. This decision was somehow considered as a qualitative turn in EU policies because in that time only a few believed that EU would accept America's requests about prohibiting oil imports from Iran.

It seems that the factors including America's pressure, and fear of the war between Iran and Israel, fear of instability, and the start of the armaments competition in the region as well as Europe's tendency to show its abilities in security issues were effective in the behavior and policy change of EU. With this action, EU finally adopted itself with US's policies and filled the gap with America about Iran's nuclear issues (Tabrizi, & Santini, 2012).

## **The Strategy of Great Powers Regarding Iran's Nuclear Dossier**

### *U.S.'s Strategy*

What happened on September 11, 2001, prepared this opportunity for America to extend its military superiority with other groups in the international system, excusing fighting against terrorism and through establishment of international security. The emergence of regional powers is one of the barriers to the advancement of the U.S.'s goals that was completely true in the Middle East; so the militarization of the space of international environment after September 11, 2001, is the main result of the mentioned terrorist event and turns middle east to the center and the focus point of America's deterrent strategy. America, in domestic, regional, and international scales endeavored to introduce Iran as one of the three countries from the axis of evil and as the most important danger for international security. So, the U.S. chose political and economic isolation as the best way to accomplish this (Mousavian, 2008). U.S.'s efforts tend to prove that Iran is trying to produce nuclear weapons and violate Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and politically invalidate the resolution laws of IAEA Board and the Security Council. However, U.S. considered the fact that Iran's elimination from regional and international security equations can considerably reduce the cost of political and economic conflict with this country.

### *Europe's Approach*

In fact, Europe's success in the solution of the nuclear crisis with Iran once more introduced Asia as the major defender of diplomatic and non-military approaches and strategies in the solution of international crises (Mousavian, 2008).

This issue weakens the position of America in opposition with future crises in the Middle East. Hence, America should set a more and novel attention to the frame of the future transatlantic relations (Eskandarian, 2003). Despite the mentioned cases, gradually US's unilateralism by the time of Iraq's occupation and its failure in solving Iraq's issues and Europe's inability to solve Iran's nuclear crisis prepared the situation for US and EU to be closer to Iran nuclear policy. When the priorities

of maintaining the security of the Middle East and Israel is to fight against terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism which is the source of terrorism, it strengthens and improves U.S. and EU's interests and relations in the aspect of culture, values and mutual interest (Eisenstandt, 1999).

EU reached the stage of negotiation after the period of critical negotiations until the first 1990s and the criticism of the commercial contract and cooperation with Iran is possible and is in favor of Iran and EU. EU drafted some conditions in commercial, regional, and human rights fields so that the EU and the U.S. would be safe from the terrorist attacks from Middle East countries having nuclear weapons (Mousavian, 2008). It is not a new subject that how U.S. and EU are ambiguous and confused in applying a policy for Iran's nuclear program. This subject shows the situation of Middle East actors from many sides in the 1990s, when the actors of the opposite side was divided into two groups and one group tend to adjust the behavior of Iran's authorities and the other group tends to change Iran's governmental regime.

### **European Citizens' Viewpoint about Iran's Nuclear Issue**

Along with the increase of sanctions by U.S. and EU, the support of European citizens has also increased, though public opinion disagrees with a military attack on Iran; and they also disagree with Iran's achieving to nuclear energy. As an example, most citizens of three important European countries (England, France, and Germany) extremely disagree with Iran to achieve nuclear weapons. 9 out of 10 citizens in these 3 countries disagree with Iran's nuclear energy and support sanctions. On the other hand, only half of the respondents support the idea of attacking Iran; while 63% of American citizens actually agrees with this idea.

The remarkable point is that, about the imposing the sanctions, there is a kind of generational gap among the supporters of Iran's sanctions. But generally, the young people support the sanctions; but in England, the people at 18-29 years support the sanctions about 17% less than people over 50 years. In France, also, the youth are 14% agree more with the sanctions than the old people. Meanwhile, Greek citizens dedicated the least percentage of supporting sanctions with only 55% to themselves. About military action against Iran with the purpose of preventing the achievement of a nuclear weapon also European citizens' ideas are close together. For example, 51% of French and English citizens, 50% of German citizens, and 52 percent of Italian citizens demand a military attack. But in contrast, 48% of French citizens, 41% of German citizens, and 40% of English citizens are agreed with Iran to possess military weapons.

## JCPOA and Global Powers' Demands of Iran in Nuclear Negotiations

After several round of talks in Vienna, Lausanne and Geneva, the last round of nuclear program talks began between Iran and P5+1 at Hotel Coburg in Vienna, Austria with the presence of John Kerry, the secretary of state of U.S. and Mohammad Javad Zarif, Iran's minister of foreign affairs and the two parties' panel of experts at June 27, 2015. Gradually, and at the last days of the agreement, some of the foreign affairs ministers of P5+1 thus headed to Vienna for the last stages. Finally, after several rounds extension of the talks, the nuclear comprehensive agreement which called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was signed among Iran, European Union and P5+1 (including China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain, United States of America, and Germany) in July 14, 2015 in Vienna (Haidar, 2017). According to this treaty, Iran must purge its enriched uranium reserves average and cut the storage of uranium with low enrichment to 98%, and reduce the number of centrifuges about two-third and at least for 15 years. For the next 15 years, Iran agreed to not enrich uranium more than 3.677% and not produce any new uranium enrichment facility or heavy water reactor. For supervising and confirming the implementation of the agreement by Iran, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) will have access all nuclear facilities in Iran. As a result of this agreement which contains sustainable approval of the promisors, Iran would be out of the sanctions of UN Security Council, EU, and the US. With the nuclear agreement of Vienna, twelve years confusion about Iran's nuclear dossier has ended and finally, JCPOA was executed on 17 January 2016 and the nuclear sanctions against Iran canceled.

The demands of global powers from Iran include:

- The 5% uranium must be the maximum level of enrichment

Based on the treaty of Iran and P5+1 that achieved in Geneva, Switzerland in November 2013, Iran agreed the suspension of 20% enrichment. Iran and P5+1 approved the maximum 5% enrichment in this treaty. The six global powers want the 20% uranium enrichment suspension to be still continued for the mentioned duration that is more than 10 years. Iran said that it has already produced enough the required fuel for Tehran's research reactor, which required 20% uranium, but Iran would not accept the long-term suspension.

- The limitation of enriched uranium storage

Based on Geneva's treaty, Iran agreed to deplete 5% of its 20% enriched uranium storage. According to the confirmation of International Atomic Energy Agency, Iran has reduced its uranium storage according to Geneva's agreement. The 5 percent uranium storage reduction is one of the topics still talking.

- The limitedness of Natanz and Fordow

Iran has two uranium enrichment plants, one in Natanz (Isfahan province) and the other, Fordow nuclear facility (in Qom province). After the repeated threats of

America and Israel's implicit threat for attacking Natanz, the Fordow plant was built in the mountains of south Tehran and became the main center of uranium enrichment. The P5+1 demanded usage change of Fordow plant to location engaged in research and development and transfer of uranium enrichment machines in Natanz.

- The limitation in nuclear research

Iran says it has a research and development plan for improving the quality of centrifuges and the power of uranium enrichment which is implementing. Ali Akbar Salehi, the head of atomic organization of Iran stated in 2013, during the gap between Geneva agreement and its execution that the best part of the Geneva agreement was the part of development and research which set unlimited in the agreement. The purpose of limiting Iran's research and development plan is preparing time for a nuclear breakout. The time breakout is a term used for the time required for enrichment to achieve a nuclear bomb.

- Limitations in reprocessing uranium

For recycling uranium from the consumed nuclear fuel in the reactor, a chemical operation called reprocessing is used. In this operation, first the metal shell of the consumed fuel rods is separated and then it is dissolved in hot nitric acid. As a result of this operation, 1% plutonium, 3% highly radioactive waste material, and 96.6% uranium is obtained which can be consumed in reactor again. Military reactors implement this way more effectively. Reactor and reprocessing facilities required for producing plutonium can privately be embedded in normal buildings. For this reason, the production of plutonium by this approach is a good option for any country that would clandestinely produce nuclear weapons. P5+1 countries were demanding Iran's restrictions in reproducing the depleted uranium. Iran declares that because the nature of the nuclear program is peaceful, so there is no problem to solve international concerns about this.

- The reactor change of Arak's heavy water

The reactor of Arak's heavy water, which its producing plutonium has two-fold usage, especially in nuclear weapons, has been always one of the concerning issues of negotiating countries with Iran about the nuclear program. Arak's heavy-water complex is located in 1900 km southwest of Tehran and Iran states that it would not convert it to light water and it is so serious about this.

- Inspections beyond the non-proliferation treaty (NPT)

The additional protocol to the temporary execution of NPT was requested by western countries since the beginning of Iran's nuclear dossier. This protocol allows International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors for unexpected visits.

Among other requests that go beyond the NPT is the implementation of article 3.1 of the modified lateral agreement from executive regulations of agency safeguards. Based on those regulations, countries must inform the agency from every decision

for building new nuclear facilities before the start, while based on NPT, informing the subject to the agency is not necessary six months before importing nuclear materials to the building or installations (Haidar, 2017).

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Relations between Iran and the European countries in the years after the Islamic revolution have been associated with leaps and bounds. Despite the relative improvement in relations between Europe and Iran between 1997 and 2016, with Iran's nuclear issue these relations have faced tension over time. But in this respect, the factor of America should not be ignored. In fact, during the past three decades, the positions of U.S. and EU have turned from divergence into complete convergence, over time. For example, in the 1960s, we have witnessed a type of divergence between EU and US over the implementation of D'Amato Act and sanctioning Iran's energy sector. But with Iran's nuclear issue, security considerations become the priority of EU. Iran's disagreement with the suspension of uranium enrichment has led positions of Europe and the United States to get closer to Iran's nuclear program. In one hand, because of the fact that US and EU consider Iran as a security threat, and on the other hand, because of the correlation of the interests of the EU and the U.S. and continued hostility between Iran and the United States, more and more convergence of the positions of transatlantic powers will be observed in the future. Besides these, Iran's nuclear issue has been one of the major reasons for Europe to reduce the level of mutual relations with Iran during the last decade. Although European officials claimed to recognize Iran's nuclear rights, like America, they talk about the lack of trust. The European Union has always demanded Iran for talking to and resolving the nuclear issue and normalizes the relations. This is despite the fact that European countries, mainly France, England, and Germany in recent years have supported the resolution and sanction plan against Iran, an issue which has affected different levels of relation with Iran. It seems that the EU with the diplomacy of sanctions and increasing the pressure is seeking for the prevention of a probable war in the significant region of Middle East. The EU also wants to be accompanied and coordinated with America in reacting to Iran. The EU and the 'euro-Atlantic' countries believe that increased financial and political-economic pressures can eventually force Iran to retreat from its positions and abandon enrichment with high density and sensitive nuclear activities. Therefore, there is no need for a war in the sensitive region of Middle East and near Europe's borders; because such a war can bring heavy losses in various fields to European countries and have unpredictable consequences. The main purpose of the EU from the 'sanction diplomacy' is to dissuade Iran from following the whole nuclear fuel cycle, including uranium enrichment, processing, change and conversion, plutonium separation, and the building the heavy water reactor, and force Iran to sign, confirm, and approve NPT, a policy that provoked America's support and cooperation.

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