

Beat: Politics

EP debate how the nuclear agreement could create opportunities

A great step forward

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USPA NEWS - After a decade of negotiations, a historic deal was reached in July 2015 on Iran's nuclear programme. The agreement will significantly affect the country and its role in the world. On Monday the Parliament's foreign affairs committee discussed with experts the EU's strategy towards Iran.

Although specialists pointed out the agreement could create opportunities for the EU, MEPs raised concerns about the country's human rights record. Over the past decade the EU and the UN were among those who imposed a series of sanctions on Iran, which included freezing the country's assets as well as trade restrictions, such as bans on exporting arms to Iran or not allowing countries to import crude oil and gas from there. Under the agreement that was recently concluded, these sanctions will be progressively lifted. The hearing on 20 October looked at the opportunities this creates for the EU and Iran as well as the strategy the EU should be following.

Opening the session committee vice-chair Ryszard Antoni Legutko, a Polish member of the ECR group, called the agreement a "great step forward" and stressed that lifting sanctions "opens up new opportunities for the Iranian economy". British member Richard Howitt, who is drafting an own initiative report on the EU's strategy towards Iran after the nuclear agreement, said that "we must be realistic about our expectations, but there is a shared agenda and the fight against terrorism will be one of the issues, as will the fight against drug traffic."

Dr Rouzbeh Parsi, director of the European Iran Research Group, called for dialogue: "The EU has the potential to become the most important trading partner and political interlocutor, if there are not enough red lines to kill off any discussion before it even have started," he said and added that any disagreement over Syria definitely had the potential to do that.

Ellie Geranmayeh, visiting fellow for the Middle East and North Africa Programme at the European Council on Foreign Relations, said that "if we really see Iran as a root cause of many of the conflicts which were facing in the Middle East, then it must in my opinion be also a part of the de-escalation there." And Cornelius Adebahr, research associate at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, took part in the discussion by video conference. He said: "Whether or not there is a solution to the Syrian crisis may not be up to the EU and may be decided elsewhere."

Many MEPs voiced concerns over Iran's human rights record. German Greens/EFA member Klaus Buchner said: "Eighty per cent of executions in Iran are carried out for drug offenses. Is it possible to have this sort of cooperation given the current human rights situation?" Finally, MEPs also stressed the importance of building trust between the parties involved. French EPP member Michèle Alliot-Marie asked "how can we build trust despite what has happened in the past, despite the ballistic missile test?"

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