

## European Union Intervention in the Iranian Crisis - A Sociological Institutional Perspective

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**Abstract:** *The European Union began to be involved in solving the Iranian crisis starting with 2003. While in the past the EU used to react to this type of problems by issuing declarative documents or by silence due to the internal divisions, this time the EU member states were willing to react promptly and united. The paper aims to analyze using the framework offered by sociological institutionalism whether and to what extent the values and norms incorporated in the EU's international identity, as well as processes like social mobilization, learning from other experiences and mobilization of non-state actors have influenced the European Union approach towards the Iranian nuclear crisis.*

**Keywords:** *European Union, Iranian nuclear program, institutionalism, socialization, European identity*

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### European Union reaction to the Iranian nuclear program

After the inspections undertaken in February 2003, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) published its first report on the Iranian nuclear program in June 2003, a document in which it accused Iran of failing to respect the obligations stipulated in the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) by not reporting to the Agency the uranium reprocessing activities (Tzogopoulos 2004, 33-34). While in the past the European Union (EU) used to react to this type of problems by issuing declarative documents or by silence due to the international division, this time the EU member states were willing to react promptly and united.

The problems raised by Iran's nuclear program were first discussed at the June 2003 General Affairs and External Relations Council. The EU asked Iran to answer all questions raised by the IAEA regarding its nuclear program and to conclude urgently an Additional Protocol with IAEA. These steps were considered by the EU important in order to demonstrate that the program is solely for civilian purposes.

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Beginning with June 2003, the Union decided to use conditionality as part of its approach in the Iranian nuclear crisis. As noticed even by the member states, stronger economic relations can be developed only if Iran makes progress in four main areas, namely human rights, counter-terrorism, nonproliferation and the Middle East Peace Process (Council of the European Union 2003a, 24). The main aim of the negotiations between the European Union and Iran was to determine Tehran to abandon parts of its nuclear program that raised concerns regarding proliferation, especially the plans to construct a uranium enrichment facility and a heavy water reactor (Kile 2005, 125). These elements of the Iranian nuclear program have a dual use and their elimination would have guaranteed the Union that the program has indeed only civilian purposes.

The EU emerged in 2003 as the main negotiator with Iran regarding its nuclear program and, as Anoushiravan Ehteshami noted, this was a position no one seemed to want or could enjoy (Ehteshami 2006, 81). During the first months of the negotiations, the EU was represented by the three big member states: Germany, France and the United Kingdom. Their first move was to send a letter to Iran in September 2003, in which they offered to help Iran in its nuclear program if it would cooperate with the IAEA.

The same states were the ones that signed along with Iran the so-called *Tehran Declaration* in October 2003, under which Iran agreed to sign the Additional Protocol with the IAEA and to suspend uranium enrichment, while the EU states promised to offer in return easier access to modern technology and supplies in a range of areas. A few days after the signing of this agreement, the leaders in Tehran transmitted to IAEA comprehensive documents on its past nuclear activities, and in December 2003 it signed an Additional Protocol with the Agency according to which Tehran was to offer IAEA a detailed inventory of all its nuclear activities and access to its nuclear facilities.

It was only in December 2003 that Javier Solana was added to the negotiation team as the main link between the E3 and the other member states. The E3/EU format ensured cohesion and gave the EU the capacity to act and speak unanimously in the Iranian nuclear crisis (Posch 2006, 104).

Despite the repeated contacts between the two parts, in the first half of 2004 no agreement was reached between them. After the officials of the three big member states made on October 21, 2004 a last offer that made reference to access to valuable nuclear technology in exchange of suspending all the uranium enrichment activities, and after threats issued by the same states that they will resort to sanctions in case the proposal is refused (AFP 2004), the EU and Iran concluded an agreement in November 2004 labelled the *Paris Agreement*. Iran agreed to a verified suspension of its nuclear enrichment program while the EU recognized Iran's right to have a civilian nuclear program under the NPT. Considered a major breakthrough in the EU-Iran negotiations, the *Paris Agreement* was the last deal to be reached between the two parties.

The *Paris Agreement* and the reopening in January 2005 of the negotiations for a Trade and Cooperation Agreement did not lead to a change in Iran's attitude, which considered the negotiation process to be too slow (Reuters 2005), therefore the results

were not impressive in the first part of 2005. Meanwhile, the domestic environment of Iran altered significantly following the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as president of Iran, a person less willing to make concessions to the Europeans. Neither were the other Iranian institutions willing to make substantial negotiations with the Europeans.

A proposal for reaching an agreement was presented by the European Union in August 2005 but was soon rejected by Iran on the reason that it failed to offer the expected security incentives, it did not bring anything new on the negotiation table and it would have allowed Iran to have a civil nuclear program that included two light water reactors and research reactors (IAEA 2003). The discontent of Iranians with this proposal determined them to restart on August 8, 2005 the activities at the uranium conversion facility in Isfahan.

The first phase of the European Union's intervention in stopping the nuclear crisis ends in mid-2005. This was the phase of an independent EU intervention, followed by a second phase in which the European Union's approach seemed to become more similar with that of the United States. The second phase includes multilateral negotiations, involving the newly formed P5 + 1 group, and not bilateral negotiations between the EU and Iran. The new phase meant a change in the parties present at the negotiations but also a change in the means used for solving the Iranian nuclear crisis.

Whereas the Union adopted along with the other member states of the P5 + 1 group the double strategy approach that combines the use of diplomacy with sanctions, the United States seemed to be more willing to accept a negotiated solution and became less aggressive in rhetoric, especially with reference to the military solution. We witness an alignment of the policies of the European Union and the United States on solving the nuclear proliferation case of Iran, which does not necessarily mean the total absence of transatlantic divergences, since the US were more inclined to play the role of the 'bad cop' while the European Union that of the 'good cop' in the relations with the Tehran authorities.

This rapprochement between the EU and the US did not determine the former to abandon negotiations. On the contrary, the negotiations and contacts between the EU leaders and Iran continued with some frequency from 2005 onwards through the High Representatives for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, who often played the role of the link between the P5 + 1 group and the authorities in Tehran.

The preference for diplomacy, negotiations, engagement and conditionality continued to be underlined in the documents issued by the European institutions. For example, in 2005, the European Council stated at its meeting in December that the European Union will continue to work for a diplomatic solution, "but this window will not be open forever" (Council of the European Union 2006), while in the same manner the European Parliament appreciated the European Union negotiation efforts so far and reaffirmed that the military option should not be considered for solving the current crisis and that the conclusion of a Trade and Cooperation Agreement with Iran depended on the progress registered in the field of human rights and nuclear nonproliferation (European Parliament 2005).

The more cooperative stance of the US and the proposal made by Russia for enriching uranium could not halt the decision of the Iranian state to restart its enrichment activities in January 2006. The Russian proposal would not have allowed Iran to have an indigenous nuclear program but would have still provided nuclear energy for its domestic needs.

If before 2005 the European states were still undecided on sending the nuclear file for analysis to the United Nations Security Council, the decisions of Iran totally altered the situation. The foreign ministers of Great Britain, Germany and France unanimously agreed that it was time for the Iranian nuclear file to be analysed by the main body responsible with maintaining international peace and security (BBC 2006). Moreover, the EU member states were the ones that drafted the resolution of the IAEA Board of Governors through which the file was sent to the Security Council, a fact that proves the EU determination to remain the centre in which the solutions for the Iranian nuclear crisis are harmonized.

After the file was sent to the Security Council, a resolution of the presidency of this body was adopted. The EU member states continued to be thoroughly engaged for a diplomatic solution and the opportunities for negotiations between the Union and Iran were multiple. In the first half of 2006 the Union presented to Iran two packages, the first one in May with the support of the US, and the second one in June with the support of the P5+1 group. Just one month between them, the two offers had two things in common: they were both presented by Javier Solana and they were both refused by Iran which was dissatisfied with the incentives they offered.

The refusal of Iran to accept the offer presented in June by the great powers determined them to finally agree that the best solution was deferring the case for analysis to the Security Council with the possibility of adopting some sanctions this time. As a consequence, on July 31, 2006 the first resolution on Iran is adopted by the Council. Although Iran was not sanctioned by the international community, this resolution expressly requested the suspension of all uranium enrichment activity as of August 31, 2006.

This first resolution was followed by a second one in December 2006. Despite the divergences within the P5+1 group, with the United States and Great Britain opting for harder sanctions, on one side, and with France, Germany, Russia and China preferring in the beginning to adopt milder sanctions, on the other side, they reached in the end an agreement foreseeing the adoption of multilateral sanctions. By now the international community adopted four more resolutions which either reiterate the existing sanctions or complete them, however, the sanctions against Iran are still not only weak but they also cover a range of areas of little importance for Iran, a state of fact which cannot but prove the lack of unity of the great powers in adopting harder sanctions.

The European Union was involved through the Big Three in adopting the multilateral sanctions against Iran, and represented in the voting process within the United Nations Security Council by Great Britain and France, and was at the same time a promoter alongside with the US of adopting tougher sanctions against Iran. In the end, as stated

also in the *European Union Strategy against Weapons of Mass Destruction*, the next step in case of failed negotiations is to involve the Security Council as final arbiter in cases of proliferation and to adopt sanctions (Council of the European Union 2003b).

The impossibility to get to a consensus within the UN Security Council for adopting new sanctions against Iran since 2010 onwards, but also the lack of cooperation on the part of the Iranian authorities for clarifying the nuclear program and for solving the current crisis, determined the EU member states to agree on unilateral sanctions against Iran that complete the existing multilateral ones. The first round of unilateral sanctions against Iran was adopted by the EU Council on July 26, 2010 and regarded the areas of commerce, financial services, energy, transport, banning visas and freezing the assets of persons and entities included on a list, and was followed by two other similar decisions in 2011.

The tougher sanctions were adopted at the beginning of 2012. Despite the energy interests the EU has in Iran, the member states decided on January 23, 2012 to impose an oil embargo on Iran starting from July and to block all the assets of the Central Bank of Iran in the Union (Council of the European Union 2012a). As a response, the next month Iran symbolically stopped all its oil sales to Great Britain and France (states that already solved their energy dependency problems on Iran), although some Iranian politicians have requested to stop all the commercial sales to EU with the aim of targeting states like Greece, Italy and Spain which haven't found alternatives for replacing the Iranian oil. On March 15, the EU member states decided to adopt new sanctions against Iran which aimed to disconnect 25 Iranian banks, including the Central Bank of Iran, from the SWIFT system located in Bruxelles.

Although the European Union agreed since 2006 to transfer the Iranian file to the Security Council for sanctions to be adopted, it did not lose its trust in the opportunity of using negotiations and incentives in order to convince Iran to drop elements of its nuclear program. Consequently, the negotiations continued with a certain frequency since 2006 onwards, even if no significant agreement has been reached. The EU member states preference for using diplomacy to solve the Iranian nuclear crisis is reiterated in all the documents issued by the European institutions since 2003 onwards, even when adopting the oil sanctions against Iran. The EU objective continued to be finding a comprehensive solution on the long term that would enhance the international trust in the peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear program, respecting at the same time the legitimate right of Iran to use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes according to NPT (Council of the European Union 2012b).

The cooperation between the two parts seems to improve since the presidential elections in Iran which brought Hassan Rouhani at the head of the Iranian state. Just recently the P5 + 1 and Iran met in Geneva with the aim of reaching an agreement. Iran presented a proposal that would constrain the country's nuclear program in return for a right to enrich uranium and an easing of the sanctions that have led to the economic isolation of the state.

## **Sociological institutionalism**

New institutionalism has emerged in the last two decades as the mainstream approach in European studies. The fact that the European Union, through its institutions and its dense body of law, is one of the most institutionalised organizations that can be encountered at the international level makes it an ideal ground for testing the various types of institutional approaches (Rosamond 2000, 114). Despite the controversy surrounding the types of new institutionalist approaches, a consensus seems to have emerged among most of the scholars on the existence of three main types of institutionalist thinking: rational choice institutionalism, sociological institutionalism and historical institutionalism.

Sociological institutionalism is considered to be the most active constructivist approach involved in the analysis of the European construction, having Jeffrey Checkel, Thomas Risse, and Markus Jachtenfuchs as main representatives. In contrast to rational choice institutionalism, sociological institutionalism considers that the main question to which actors have to respond is not how they can best maximize their interests but rather what is the appropriate behaviour in a certain situation.

Sociological institutionalism gives a broad definition to institutions so as to encompass not only “formal rules, procedures or norms, but the symbol systems, cognitive, and moral templates that provide the frames of meaning guiding human action” (Hall and Taylor 1996, 947). According to the theoreticians belonging to this school of thought, the institutions are not just simple contracts between egoist and rational individuals, or arenas for different competitive political forces, but collections of structures, rules and standard operational procedures that have a partial autonomous role in political life (March and Olsen 2009, 160).

As mentioned by Hall and Taylor, sociological institutionalism seeks to explain why organizations adopt a specific set of norms, procedures, values, and emphasizes how such practices are diffused across institutions or countries (Hall and Taylor 1996, 947). The institutional environment is seen from this perspective as being a promoter of homogeneity among the actors. Practices are diffused over time across actors due to the process of the so-called “institutional isomorphism”, through which norms are accepted by the actors as they want their behaviour to be perceived as legitimate and appropriate (Miller and Banaszak-Holl 2005, 198).

Norm diffusion or isomorphism is considered by Jeffrey Checkel as being a consequence of two processes: social learning and social mobilization (Checkel 2001, 557). While social mobilization highlights the importance of non-state actors and interests groups in the process of diffusion, social learning stresses the importance of elites. Sociological institutionalism also emphasizes the role that communication and discursive practices play in the process of diffusion, with discursive agents helping actors make sense of the world.

Another distinctive feature of sociological institutionalism is the special way of conceiving the relation between institutions and actors. The individual is a product of the institutional environment in which it is deeply embedded. Institutions tend to have “constitutive effects on corporate actors such as national governments, interests groups, but also individuals” (Risse 2004, 17). Institutions alter in time not only the actors’ preferences but also their identities. There is a constant interaction between agency and structure, interaction during which they alter one another: institutions can alter actors but at the same time actors can alter the institutional environment in which they act.

The last important feature of sociological institutionalism is the way it perceives the actors’ logic of action. In contrast to rational choice institutionalism’s logic of instrumentality, sociological institutionalism considers that actors behave according to the logic of appropriateness. The functioning of the appropriateness logic can be considered a version of the role theory. The institutions define a set of behavioural expectations for individuals with positions within the institution and then consolidate that behaviour which is appropriate for a role and sanction the one being inappropriate (Peters 2005, 31).

Without denying the rationality that characterizes rational choice institutionalism, the sociological type considers that individuals will make conscientious decisions, but these choices will remain in the parameters established by the dominant institutional values. Due to the importance afforded to norms and principles, some authors state that sociological institutionalism brings into discussion “the identity logic”. Therefore, the actors’ rationality is considered to be rather contextual than instrumental, deriving from the community identity to which actors belong.

Sociological institutionalism contributes substantially to our understanding of the European Union. As mentioned by Joseph Jupille and James A. Caporaso, European institutions help member states define their preferences and options and define what constitutes the appropriate behaviour for a member state in a certain situation. Sociological institutionalism can also explain the diffusion of norms from the European to the domestic level through the process of so-called Europeanisation (Jupille and Caporaso 1999, 435-436). In other words, being one of the members of the European Union matters.

At the same time, one cannot deny that sociological institutionalism has its drawbacks. As Aspinwall and Schneider recognize, individuals are not helpless and as such they can escape institutions (Aspinwall and Schneider 2001). Furthermore, it is very difficult to measure the extent to which values and norms influence behaviour. Analyzing the utility of this approach, Taylor and Hall notice that sociological institutionalism is better at explaining the way in which institutions appear, but does not take into account the possible conflicts between actors with divergent interests (Hall and Taylor 1996, 954). Finally, it is considered that the methodology of sociological institutionalism is too empiric and case studies oriented to lead to general conclusions.

## **The European Union intervention in the Iranian nuclear crisis – a sociological institutionalist perspective**

In their reaction to the Iranian nuclear crisis, EU member states believed that dialogue and negotiations are the best means for reaching an agreement, at least in the first part of their intervention, followed by multilateral sanctions completed by unilateral sanctions. During its intervention, the Union paid special attention to the position of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the UN Security Council and the international community. The EU's involvement had as a base the respect for and wish to preserve the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. These instruments cannot be considered rational but a consequence of the international identity of the European Union.

### *The international identity of the European Union*

The literature on the European Union pays considerable attention to the EU's international identity and a consensus seems to have been reached that this identity can be located in a set of principles which influence the EU's relations with the rest of the world. While article 11 of the European Union Treaty defines the objectives of the Common Foreign and Security Policy and mentions that these objectives will be attained with respect for the principles included in the United Nations Charter, article 21 of the consolidated version of the Treaty goes further in defining the principles that form the basis of the European Union external action, underlying that it will be guided by the same principles that have inspired the creation, development and enlargement of the Union and which the EU seeks to promote at the international level: "democracy, rule of law, universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity, as well as respect for the United Nations Charter and international law principles" (European Union 2010).

The European Union has proved that its policy differs from that of the United States when it comes to Iran. Starting with the axis of evil speech the differences between the two world powers have become more obvious, pointing to the fact that the EU and the US have the same objectives but different means of achieving them. The distance between the two entities has decreased since 2005 when the USA agreed to offer incentives while the Union became more inclined to apply unilateral as well as multilateral sanctions. Even in these circumstances, the EU is more ready to make concessions to Iran in comparison with the US and totally rejects the use of force as a means for solving the crisis. In fact, we can state that the roles of 'good cop' and 'bad cop' have been adopted involuntarily being applicable for the entire external policy of the two entities.

From the beginning of the nuclear crisis, the EU rejected the US preference for using force in convincing Iran to drop its nuclear program. This is a consequence of the fact



that EU member states have a preference for employing non-military means and its soft power when dealing with problem states. The European Union is in essence a civilian or soft power in international community, using every opportunity to show its preference for influencing international relations through norms and not force. For the European Union force is used strictly for peace and never for its own interests. The rejection of the military solution was reaffirmed by the European institutions, the European Parliament stating in this respect that the military option should not be considered for solving the current crisis (European Parliament 2005). In these circumstances, the only alternative option for Europe to coerce is the power of ideas.

Another facet of the international identity developed by the European Union is the respect for international law and the primary role given to international organizations as part of the efficient multilateralism that the EU tries to promote in international affairs. At this point, it is important to notice that the pressures exerted by the United States on the European leaders for adopting sanctions against Iran did not succeed, as the Union preferred to wait for a verdict of the UN Security Council, the main body responsible for maintaining international peace and security, which came only in 2006. This stance reflects the fact that for the EU effective multilateralism implies that the UNSC should be the final arbiter in cases of non-compliance with the NPT regime.

The respect for the international organizations involved in the field of nuclear nonproliferation was declared on numerous occasions by the European Union but also proved in practice. Therefore, the member states declared on each occasion their support for the International Atomic Energy Agency and requested Iran to cooperate with IAEA, and constantly asked Iran to respect the resolutions issued by the UN Security Council and to fully cooperate with IAEA for solving all the issues.

Multilateralism is part of the EU's international identity but also a way of acting. It is relevant in this sense to underline the fact that the Union preferred only in the first part to act alone to solve the Iranian crisis, and once the other great powers understood the magnitude of the problem the intervention under the P5 + 1 formula was preferred, with the EU, represented mainly by the High Representative for CFSP, acting as mediator between Iran and this group.

From the EU's point of view, economic and political instruments as well as long-term engagement are considered to be the best solution when it comes to dealing with cases of nuclear proliferation. The European Union does not try from the start to solve a problem with threats but always tries to attract the other by offering incentives. In this context, the European Union has tried to give as much oxygen to Iran as it could in order to persuade it to abandon some parts of its nuclear program. The EU kept negotiations open for as long as Iran did not restart enriching uranium and also refused to send Iran's case to be solved by the UNSC because it considered that it would not be productive and would have harmed the negotiation process (Kile 2005, 13).

Moreover, the EU considers that if states show a desire to acquire WMD, this is because of their sense of insecurity, and the Union states in its *Strategy against Weapons of Mass Destruction* that "the more secure countries feel, the more likely they are to

abandon programs” (Council of the European Union 2003b, 7). This determined the EU to promise in all its agreements with Iran concerning the nuclear problem that it will promote security and stability in the region, a factor which has influenced considerably Iran’s preference for a nuclear program.

The European Union also stressed in its approach towards Iran that progress in TCA is closely linked with progress in the nuclear discussion. As such, conditionality can be said to have been the main characteristic of the EU’s stance in the Iranian nuclear crisis. The EU’s preference to use conditionality in cases of WMD is emphasized in its WMD strategy and cannot but be seen as being a consequence of the success that conditionality had in transforming the candidate countries, and not only them. Conditionality, as element of the international identity of the EU, is irrational, since other states, such as China and Russia, do not use the strategy of asking the target states to make reforms before any form of cooperation, as does the EU (Baran 2007, 137).

During its history, the EU opted as much as possible to promote reform through constructive interaction and to export the values that have made it a peaceful and prosperous organization. When the constructive interaction is not possible anymore and the basic values of the European Union are threatened, member states usually act by imposing unilateral sanctions. In these circumstances, the EU decision to use multilateral and unilateral sanctions in solving the Iranian nuclear crisis is understandable. The *European Union Strategy against Weapons of Mass Destruction* expressly states that in cases of proliferation political and diplomatic means will be used in a first phase, and only when these measures fail, there will be used coercive measures adopted according to Chapter VII of the UN Charter and the international law” (Council of the European Union 2003b).

The values incorporated in the international identity of the European Union, among which preference for political and diplomatic tools in solving conflicts and disputes, multilateralism, respect for international law and international institutions, conditionality and engagement, have become in time so embedded in the external policy collective actions of the member states that they are not questioned anymore. These values surely have influenced the EU’s intervention in solving the Iranian nuclear crisis, since they characterize any external action of the Union.

#### *Socialisation of member states*

Socialisation can be defined as being the process by which actors construct their understanding of the world through experiences. If this is the case, anyone can agree that a socialisation of the EU’s member states has appeared during their more than thirty years of considerable experience in CFSP. Membership in the European club can be said to matter as it alters the perception of member states on world affairs and their way of dealing with crisis when acting together. Regarding the EU’s approach to the Iranian nuclear crisis, the socialization of member states appeared due to the long term

relations with Iran, relations that were based mostly on engagement, conditionality and sanctions, but also due to the past cooperation of member states in solving nuclear crises.

As mentioned before, there are significant differences in the policies of the United States and Europe towards Iran. If before 1990 these policies tended to be similar, the situation changed radically starting with 1993, when President Clinton launched the so-called policy of dual containment aiming at changing Iran and Iraq by applying unilateral sanctions, while the European states launched the critical dialogue with Iran based on economic engagement, conditionality and cooperation in different areas with the aim of changing the Iranian domestic political landscape (Moshaver 2003, 294). The dissimilarity in attitude between the two entities reveals once again the importance that the European Union gives in its external policy actions to dialogue, as a first method for solving any dispute before applying coercive measures in the form of sanctions.

In practice, the EU policy of engaging Iran has been based on a critical dialogue which was launched in 1992. A comprehensive dialogue replaced the critical one in 1998, and in 2001 discussions on concluding a TCA started in parallel with the political dialogue. One can notice that it is since the 1990s that EU-Iran relations have been based on critical engagement. In the opinion of some authors the critical dialogue, and later the comprehensive dialogue, represented a regime in itself that shaped the European Union reaction to the nuclear crisis, allowing, unlike in the Iraq case, a unitary involvement of member states. The most important element of the regime was the requirement for member states to meet regularly and to coordinate their actions in Iran, acting as a double regime by bringing at the same table the Europeans and the Iranians and due to the necessity for the European states to align their mutual interest towards Iran with the aim of acting united (Goldthau 2008, 56).

As for conditionality, this became obvious only when the EU linked the signing of the TCA to improved behaviour of Iran in issues such as: human rights and the Middle East peace process. Despite the impression of EU member states that the critical dialogue was successful, the general opinion is that the results obtained by engaging Iran were at best moderate. Nevertheless, the dialogue was a tool already employed by the EU in its relation with Iran and could have proved to be successful also in solving the Iranian nuclear file.

Sanctions are not a novelty for the foreign policy of the European Union, as they have been applied since the 1980s, and more frequent after 1989, to a big variety of states and for different reasons, from human rights violations to terrorism (Syria and Lebanon in the 1990s). However, Iran is the first state to face sanctions by the EU member states for developing weapons of mass destruction.

The EU's involvement in cases of nuclear proliferation meant in practice the existence of cooperation between member states in this field for more than twenty years, and the Commission was engaged since the 1950s. In time, nuclear nonproliferation and the fight against weapons of mass destruction evolved into an objective of the European Union that was to be mainstreamed in all Community policies. At the same time,

member states tried to have a common position since 1995 onwards at the NPT Review Conferences, which are held every five years, but they have also attempted through other ways to consolidate the NPT and the fight against proliferation.

The collapse of the Soviet Union determined the European Union to intensify its nonproliferation efforts especially in the ex-Soviet space starting with 1989, the aim of the intervention being to dismantle the nuclear programs of the former Soviet states and to improve the nuclear safety measures in these states (Denza 2005, 289-331). The European efforts were not limited to the ex-Soviet space, since the Union was equally involved in solving the Libyan nuclear proliferation case, where it acted as mediator between the Libyan authorities and Washington.

The year 2003 saw even more actions of the EU in the field of non-proliferation, as the EU adopted as many as four documents related to WMD. The first ones were the *Declaration on Non-Proliferation*, adopted at the Thessalonica European Council in June 2003, the *Basic Principles for an EU Strategy against the Proliferation of WMD* and an *Action Plan for the Implementation of the Principles*. These were followed in December 2003 by the *EU Strategy against WMD*, a document that emphasizes the principles of EU's international identity in fighting proliferation: multilateralism, multilateral organization, cooperation with the international community and the importance of political and diplomatic means.

While the socialization of the member states in dealing with Iran and with the WMD can be considered an important factor in shaping the EU's approach towards the Iranian nuclear crisis, this is not all that sociological institutionalism tells us. As mentioned in the theoretical chapter, socialization is not only a consequence of past experience with the target country but also a consequence of learning from similar cases with which actors have dealt in the past and of mobilization of non-state actors. The role that the two processes played in the EU's approach towards Iran is analysed in the lines that follow.

#### *Learning from similar experiences*

Learning from similar experiences from the past takes into account the learning process from the nuclear cases of proliferation in Iraq, Libya and North Korea, even though the European Union was not engaged directly in solving these three cases. In the case of Iraq, the debates and the war that aimed to stop proliferation, the Union learned that it cannot find agreement with the US in what regards challenging the proliferation of WMD (Calabrese 2004, 8), but also that EU member states cannot find agreement even among themselves when it comes to using force in dealing with international crises.

Moreover, the Iraq case brought into discussion the delicate issue of defining the way and criteria on which a real threat is evaluated, since Iraq proved after all to have no nuclear capacity, although the US claimed it did have, just before starting the war

(Lindstrom, 2003, 5). This fact strongly influenced the EU to apply a more cautious stance in the Iranian case and to remain prudent until everything is clear about the nuclear program of the target country, the primary role in clarifying all aspects being attributed to the United States and the International Atomic Energy Agency, and not to a single member state of the international community. The European Union paid attention during its intervention to solve the Iranian crisis to the positions and evaluations made by these international bodies and their main officials.

In 2002 the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, responded to the accusations of the USA on Iran by stating that there are no proofs that this state wants to develop nuclear weapons, while in 2004 the IAEA advised the international community not to send the Iranian nuclear file for analysis to the Security Council, as this is a step that could have determined the leaders in Tehran to follow the path chosen by North Korea and withdraw from the NPT.

Allowing the international bodies to evaluate a nuclear program is even more important if we take into account the practical difficulty of distinguishing between peaceful and non-peaceful nuclear capabilities of a state (Alvarez-Verdugo 2006, 437), and the difficulty in deciding the point in which sanctions are to be applied, since there is no standard model for punishing the states that proliferate. The Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty allows states to have civilian nuclear programs, and if the IAEA was not sure in its reports and resolutions on the extent and severity of the Iranian nuclear program, how could the EU adopt a strategy that is not based on caution? The German and French policy for Iraq of 'wait and see' seems to have been preferred this time by all EU member states.

From all the three cases of proliferation mentioned already, Iraq, North Korea and Libya, the Union learned another important lesson, namely that threatening to use force is inefficient in determining states to drop their nuclear programs, especially if the program is in an advanced state of development. The involvement in the Libyan case stimulated the European Union to believe that it can successfully act again as mediator between a problem state and the authorities in Washington. The North Korean case revealed that too much criticism and isolation can lead to a radicalization of the regime and withdrawal from the NPT, but also that multilateral as well as unilateral sanctions can alter the behaviour of a state if they are applied gradually and for a long time. Having in mind that the conservative parties in Iran favoured the withdrawal from NPT (Roschandel 2005, 68), the Union had to be cautious in order to avoid the Korean scenario. From the Libyan case, the EU has learned that incentives and negotiations can solve problems related to nuclear proliferation.

The European Union also had some examples of multilateral intervention of the international community with the aim of solving different crises. The multilateral discussions model was often used not only in cases of nuclear proliferation, the North Korean case being the most noteworthy example through the Six Party Talks, but also for solving long standing conflicts, such as the one in Transnistria or the one in the Middle East. In both these cases, the European Union has been involved directly. The multilateral discussions are useful in the opinion of the European Union as they ensure

that all interested parties are present at the negotiation table and they avoid cases in which a single state could be considered responsible for the failure of diplomatic or political efforts.

### *Social mobilization*

Social mobilization, one of the mechanisms through which actors comply with social norms, considers that domestic actors and transnational organizations put pressure on decision-makers to act in a certain manner (Checkel 2001, 557). In the case of Iran, among the actors that opted for a cautious and gradual approach of the European Union are the European Commission, the European Parliament, the interest groups, public opinion and some international organizations, such as the International Atomic Energy Agency. The European Union's approach in the Iranian case clearly reflected the preferences of these actors that used the discursive method with the aim of directing the community action on the path they preferred.

The European Commission had starting with 1990 the most positive attitude towards Iran and this attitude was reflected in all the documents it issued but also in the discourse of the European Commissioners on the topic of Iran. The fact that this institution preferred engagement and conditionality in the first part of the EU intervention is obvious, and this position results from the documents issued by this supranational institution, such as the *Commission's communication to the Parliament on the EU relations to Iran*, where conditionality is considered to be the most adequate way of acting (European Commission 2001). The European Commission did not hesitate to express even in public interventions its preference for a policy of engagement and conditionality through public protests determined by the European Council decision to suspend the negotiation for concluding any agreement before solving the nuclear file.

It was also the European Commission that always favoured a stronger involvement of the European Union in cases of nuclear proliferation, being itself an institution with experience in this field since the 1950s. As nuclear nonproliferation is one of the objectives of the EU's external action, the European Commission decided to adopt a tougher tone towards Iran starting with 2005 and stated that the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty needs to be safeguarded with all possible means.

Another institution with a special role in solving the Iranian crisis is the High Representative for CFSP. The role of this institution was not necessarily that of fixing the agenda of the discussions with the Iranian authorities and to influence the process of solving the Iranian crisis but to act as mediator between the involved parties and to promote a diplomatic solution.

On the mobilization of interest groups, their economic interests in Iran surely have influenced the decision of the European Union to adopt a strategy based on caution, conditionality and engagement. While the mobilization of interest groups points to the economic interests, not the same can be said about the public opinion. If some of the

European member states have been able to bypass the opposition of the public opinion to the Iraq war, in the Iran case they could not apply the same strategy. By the time the EU began to get involved seriously in solving the Iran case, citizens as well as politicians had learned from Iraq the drawbacks of using force when dealing with a rogue state.

The International Atomic Energy Agency also showed its preference for political and diplomatic means, appreciating that there is no good alternative to negotiations (International Crisis Group 2006, 13). The IAEA probably had the most impartial and objective opinion in the Iranian nuclear case, opinion that the European Union took into account due to its values that emphasize the respect for international law and for international organizations. The IAEA did not hesitate to send the file for analysis to the UN Security Council when the problems regarding the Iranian nuclear program seemed to be too many and the negotiation solution impossible to be applied. It also refused to support any opinion that asked for the use of force in this case of nuclear proliferation.

## **Conclusions**

To conclude, one can say that sociological institutionalism rightly predicts that values are important factors in shaping actors' behaviour, and that institutions tell actors who they are and how they should behave. Membership in the European Union matters, as one can notice that values incorporated in EU's international identity had a strong impact on the member states' decision to use conditionality and engagement when dealing with the Iranian nuclear crisis and only in case of failure of these methods to use multilateral and unilateral sanctions. The socialization of member states that appeared as regards Iran and also as regards nuclear proliferation cases, learning from similar cases and experiences, and also the mobilization of non-state actors influenced the European Union decision to choose in its intervention in the Iranian case means considered to be correct, adequate and appropriate. In its future foreign policy actions, the European Union is expected choose its intervention tools from a set of options defined by institutions according to the "logic of appropriateness".

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