## European Security

## European Union discourses and practices on the Iranian nuclear programme

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# European Union discourses and practices on the Iranian nuclear programme

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This article aims at analysing different, partly overlapping and partly competing European security discourses that have emerged on the Iranian nuclear issue since 2003. Three main discursive themes have been singled out exemplifying the main identity representations of Iran and Europe, the main stances towards Iran and the representations of the nature of European foreign policy. Over the years, the coercive-securitisation discourse has become hegemonic over democracy promotion and cultural diplomacy-inspired discourses and European policies have consistently followed suit. In terms of security governance, the European Union (EU) has created a format for negotiations, which has undergone subsequent enlargements, consistent with its securitised but multilateral discourses. While the nature of the collegial security governance espoused has brought positive effects in terms of reinforcing the EU's own identity as an international actor both inside and outside, the resilience of the first discursive theme throughout the process despite other international actors' dissonance signals that a more comprehensive and inclusive discourse towards the Iranian nuclear issue has failed to emerge.

**Keywords:** European security governance; identity; securitisation; discourses; nuclear power; Iran

Relations between Europe and Iran have a long history and have often been characterised by stumbling blocks in the political and diplomatic processes of rapprochement ever since the Iranian revolution. Be it on human rights dialogue, economic matters (negotiations on the belated EC Trade and Cooperation Agreement, TCA, aiming at intensifying economic relations and strengthening dialogue and cooperation in various fields) or wider political relations, the two parties' relations track record has fallen short from seeing qualitative leaps. The few sporadic windows of opportunity have been poorly seized by Europe and European countries, if not for bilateral economic relations. Trust has been a political capital failing, in both parties' perception, to be adequately built and strengthened. And yet, engagement, either critical, constructive or dual track diplomacy, has never ceased to see both sides deeply involved in some sort of diplomatic relations.

Analyses of the Iranian nuclear programme from a military or strategic point of view abound mostly concentrated on short-term developments and potential policy evolution on the international and the domestic side; as do those reflecting on the implications for non-proliferation worldwide or for the region and its stability. This

study will instead focus on how the issue has been understood, processed, represented and acted upon by all relevant international actors, in particular the three European countries involved in negotiations and former High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), the so-called EU3 format.

Making sense of an actor's foreign policy decisions and their evolution vis-à-vis another actor is almost an impossible task without a clear understanding of how the latter identity is perceived by the former. In other words, in order to account for European foreign policy (EFP) vis-à-vis the Iranian nuclear programme, through the analysis of multiple discourses we will establish links between discourses and identity representations and we will try to establish the relationship between these elements and the policies adopted by the European Union (EU) in this field. In line with a poststructuralist approach to intertextuality, discourse conveys ideas (Schmidt 2008, p. 3), being at the juncture between identity, ideas and policy. According to Hansen (2006, p. 51): 'Foreign policy discourses are analytical constructions through which the construction and linking of identity and policy can be studied'. This goes back to the understanding of discourse by Christou *et al.* (2010, pp. 9–10): by 'discourse' we mean to identify how language is implicated in a range of social relations involving power, domination, ideology and cooperation (Fairclough 1993). Discourse is what enables the continuing co-constitution of identity and policy, and hence, security. And while the step from discourse to tracing identity representation is relatively straightforward (Lupovici 2009, p. 202), discourses should be considered only enabling elements for certain kinds of political action to be taken and not as direct causal conditions (Neumann, in Klotz and Prakash 2008, pp. 62–64).

Since 'Securitisation is both a performative speech as well as an intersubjective process between the securitising actor and an audience' (Balzacq 2005, p. 275 ff.), 'discourse analysis is the necessary research method to uncover "specific rhetorical structures" for the existential threat' (Floyd and Croft 2010, p. 17).

By shedding light on the parallel and multiple images of Iran held by Europeans, interpreting European policies becomes an easier task. Not only this, by searching for textual elements in EU and international foreign policy official documents on the nuclear issue which go back to one or several identity representations of Iran, it will be possible to ascertain the direction in which, in such a sensitive foreign policy area, the nature of EFP has changed and to what extent. In this context, this article will focus on three competing but partly overlapping logics at play behind the evolution of EFP towards Iran: securitisation, democratisation and cultural diplomacy, corresponding to three separate but at times overlapping discursive themes in Europe.

In order to understand and make explicit the link between identity and policy, starting from the historical development of the nuclear dossier, a timeline and relevant key points will be identified, which will provide guidance for a deeper analysis of the discourses and practices of the main actors involved over time. The main sources that will be interrogated for this purpose will include foreign policy documents, speeches, interviews, debates between 2003 and 2010, produced by the Council, the High Representative for the CFSP, the External Relations Commissioner, the European Parliament, French, German and British Foreign ministers and secretaries, in addition to declarations by the EU3+3.

Two disclaimers must be added before proceeding with the analysis. The discursive analysis this article sets forth is limited to European and international

foreign policy official discourses. In other words, it will fail to take into account what Lene Hansen names intertextuality Models 2 and 3 (Hansen 2006, p. 74), the former encompassing the wider media debate, oppositional political parties and corporate groups (NGOs, trade unions, etc.) and the latter referring to studies of popular culture and marginal political discourse. It will do so by assuming that the debate around the Iranian nuclear issue has been, at least in Europe (among EU institutions and European member states), significantly cohesive in how the nuclear programme has been depicted. Divergences have emerged mainly in relation to possible military routes for the international community or international actors. Some possible common themes among foreign policy discourses around which discursive elements have converged will be advanced.

## European Union discourses on the Iranian nuclear issue: historical genealogy and typology

Before delving into the discursive themes characterising how the Iranian nuclear issue has been dealt with in official discourses internationally and most specifically in Europe, it is necessary contextually to briefly sketch out an historical genealogy of Western and European perceptions and depictions of Persia and Iran.

A mainstream view throughout Western historiography goes back to the Greeks, whose encounters and confrontations with the Persians lasted centuries. To Greeks, Asians were a people ruled by tyrants, despots with absolute power, a hierarchical and rigid society, almost socially immobile, with an immense gap between the ruler and the ruled (Lockman 2010, pp. 11–13). In his *The Histories*, Herodotus (1998) formulated a more nuanced and complex appraisal of Persians (Asheri, Lloyd and Corcella 2007, p. 44), acknowledging a set of virtues of Persians as a people (among their moral principles, the love of truth, justice and generosity), while differentiating Persians from Greeks during the period of their confrontation: an incredibly rich empire with an amorphous mass of soldiers obliged to fight as opposed to a poor country with an army composed by few and brave soldiers (*The Histories*, VII 60; 101–104). It is in the period of the Greek–Persian wars that the term 'barbarians' becomes closely associated to a territory, indicating Persians, subjugated by despots and unfamiliar with the idea and practice of 'polis'.

An alternative reading based on French travel biographies portrayed an image of Iran as an opulent, joyful and sophisticated country with which France has always sought to deepen cultural and economic relations (Delfani 2008, p. 72). A third perspective was offered by British historians, who, since the discovery of the Indo-European language family at the end of the eighteenth century, stressed the elements of resemblance between Persia and Europe, referring to 'noble' Persians of European descent as racially close to Europeans. Philology came to be used as a basis for theorising about race and making claims for an Iranian national identity. This racist reading of a positive Iranianness was endorsed by Iranians too and it came of age during the Pahlavi dynasty. Under Mohammed Reza Shah, by referring to these 'historically rooted' elements of similarity and cultural closeness, the dependence on Western narratives for justifying the Pahlavi state and the monarchy became complete (Vaziri 1993, p. 61). This narrative, however, was at odds with European colonialism which dominated the European powers' agenda from the eighteenth century. Namely, although Iran never became a colony, it was a crossroads where imperial powers,

especially Russia, the UK and France, established interest divisions in the greater Asian region.

Over time, Iranian rulers adopted elements of European discourses in order to legitimise their power and even tried to produce new discourses in line with what they considered Western thinking and worldviews. Three examples spring to mind: first, during the cold war, the Shah successfully used threat-framing of the Soviet Union to integrate himself and Iran within a US cold war narrative. Second, after the 1979 revolution, and especially after 1989 with the so-called 'second republic', Iranian policy-makers tried to re-create the same narrative but in vain: the geopolitics of the region had changed and the Soviet Union had ceased to be seen as a threat. Lastly, Iranian policy-makers from the end of the 1990s tried to portray the country as a centre of stability for the entire region, again without success (Mohammadi and Ehteshami 2000, p. 40).

Hence, while we can trace back prevailing European and Western readings of Iran and its politics from the early stages of European travellers' accounts, from this very brief historical overview, it is evident that Iranian interpretations of their role in the region's political evolution and in international affairs were by and large neglected and never incorporated in European discourses and cultural representations. This has some bearing on the way in which a crucial political and security issue as the Iranian nuclear programme has been depicted by Western leaders and media, in isolation from Iranian own readings and discursive justifications.

By looking at the debate in Europe over the Iranian nuclear issue from 2003 onwards, three non-exclusive discursive themes are identified indicating the main structural positions within the debate and around which most opinions converge. Since these discourses do not logically exclude each other, multiple discourses are found belonging to the same actor, albeit with different degrees of intensity or predominance. None of these discourses explicitly go back to the historical discursive strands we have identified above, but they do incorporate some of these elements. What do these discourses share? Ideally, they should construct different *Others* with different degrees of radical difference, articulate radically diverging forms of identity and construct competing links between identity and policy (Hansen 2006, p. 51).

The first discursive theme revolves around an image of untrustworthiness of the Iranian regime and its foreign policy. No references to the Iranian population are made here, possibly because it is not considered an active part of the public sphere. What is underlined is the necessity for Iran to regain international confidence and prove its good faith to the international community. Also, along the same lines, the possible dangerous regional implications of Iran's behaviour, ranging from instability to a nuclear arms race are stressed.

The West (mainly, but not only, Europe) is portrayed as a tireless, generous and normative actor. In this respect, syntactic dichotomies between 'us' vs. 'them' are looked at, where 'us' either stands for European or the international community (good, peaceful, hard working, diplomatic, etc.) and 'them' for the Iranian leadership. What stands out is a depiction of a securitised foreign policy characterised by a coercive style. This article adopts Alexander George's definition of coercive diplomacy: 'The general idea of coercive diplomacy is to back one's demand on an adversary with a threat of punishment for non-compliance that he will consider credible and potent enough to persuade him to comply with the demand' (George 1997, p. 4). The fact that securitisation has taken place on how this issue is

being dealt with is symbolised by a robust diplomacy where words are rapidly transformed into deeds and where the extreme politicisation of this issue has contributed to reducing the room for manoeuvre of contending voices, therein included parliamentarians, national and European. Securitisation here is manifested also by the reduced need to explain why this issue poses real and grave dangers to international and European security, rendering it almost a tautological fact. In terms of governance, this could be defined a hierarchical governance mode based on command and punishment, in this case exemplified by the threat of sanctions and coercive measures (Heupel 2007).

The second discursive theme concentrates on an image of the Iranian regime as semi-authoritarian and illiberal with reference to human-right violations, lack of respect for civil liberties and political repression, the latter especially since 12 June 2009 elections. It could be said that this follows the 'philo-Greek' interpretation whereby we, Europeans/Westerners, are agents of civilisation and a force for good in international politics, as opposed to despotic and unforeseeable 'Asians'. This theme links with the issue of the nuclear programme because domestic politics heavily impacts upon the Iranian political leadership and enter into their foreign policy calculations. In times of serious upheavals, the elite's fear of an upcoming 'velvet revolution' strengthens international leverage in nuclear negotiations, while when the regime does not feel domestically threatened, its foreign policy stance will become more aggressive and less inclined to compromise (Clawson 2010). This discursive theme is articulated by tying together different elements, arguing also that a nuclear Iran would be in a stronger position vis-à-vis Western critiques of human-rights record that would back off from openly criticising the Islamic Republic (Clawson 2009). Here the representation is of a backward and repressive regime, with an ensuing call for a more normative EU foreign policy, with a strong emphasis on democracy promotion. This is a politicised approach, fitting into the category Christou *et al.* define as 'normal EU politics' (pp. 341–359). Discursively, this is done through calls to respect universal standards for human rights, criticisms of current behaviour and calls to abide by international human-rights standards and conventions. In terms of governance modes, this discursive theme sets the ground for a soft governance approach based on cooperation, here discursively exemplified by the 'naming and shaming' of Iran (Heupel 2007, p. 9).

The third theme focuses on Iranian rights and resources. Somehow this more 'historically aware and culturally inspired' reading goes back to acknowledgements of Persia as a rich and sophisticated country. What are particularly singled out are the following elements: right to civilian nuclear power, great civilisation, political regime resilience, oil strength, and regional and international allies. With regard to the nuclear dossier, these elements are relevant in so far as they point to the regime's assets when blackmailing or trying to tame potential Western aggressive behaviour. European diplomacy takes into account these positive features and favours diplomacy at all costs, emphasises all possible carrots to Iran (a TCA with the European Commission, accession to WTO, civilian nuclear assistance). The nature of EFP is a constructive diplomacy where cultural considerations play a role alongside strategic ones. In governance terms, this would be considered an example of non-politicised governance (Christou *et al.* 2010, pp. 341–359).

The timeline starts from October 2003 when Iran signed the NPT Additional Protocol, proceeds with November 2004 when the EU3 and Iran made a deal in Paris

(Paris agreement), then June 2006, when the EU3+3 formally made Iran a comprehensive offer in Vienna (Vienna proposal) and then is punctuated by the three most relevant rounds of sanctions so far, United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1737 in December 2006, UNSC Resolution 1747 in March 2007 and UNSC Resolution 1803 in March 2008.

The EU has expressed its stance on Iran in an evolving format, initially comprising only the 'Big Three', i.e. France, Germany and the UK (E3), who, mainly in a preventive move vis-à-vis an expected US military approach, decided to launch diplomatic negotiations with Iran based on a dual-track approach, combining diplomatic offers and the threat of sanctions. In terms of European security governance, this self-proclaimed contact group, the E3, had only a partial legitimacy within the EU, since it was considered as not representing smaller parties (personal communication, Italian Embassy Tehran, February 2008) and the product of a out-fashioned thinking whereby France and the UK, in light of their UNSC's seat, would best speak for Europe, with the addition of Iran's European strongest trading partner, Germany. The trio had diverging stances on how to deal with the issue, with France and Germany securitising the issue from the beginning and London refraining from doing so until the departure of British Foreign Minister, Jack Straw. At the end of 2003, as a consequence of EU member states' insistence, the format was enlarged to the High Representative Javier Solana, becoming the EU3, gaining intra-EU legitimacy for further initiatives. A stronger internal cohesiveness on this issue, however, did not conceal the lack of a truly multilateral agreement with the other UNSC members, the USA, Russia and China, able to bring to the table real sticks and carrots. When the group enlarged to them, in 2006, the European stance became aligned with the USA vis-à-vis a softer Chinese–Russian approach. Security governance was eventually multilateral, and yet inconclusive.

## The E3, the EU3, EU3+3 and the Iranian nuclear programme

Iran's nuclear programme began in the mid-1970s also thanks to Western assistance, when Iran was considered an anti-Soviet bastion in the Middle East (El-Kawas 2005, pp. 20–41). In the aftermath of the Islamic revolution and the hostage crisis, the USA broke off diplomatic and economic relations with the Islamic Republic, including nuclear cooperation. The programme was interrupted also given Khomeini scepticism towards nuclear technology and the dependence on the West this created. He also declared his ethical opposition to the idea of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) (Perthes, Takeyh, and Tanaka 2008, p. 79), as did, in August 2005, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei pronouncing a fatwa against the development, production, stockpiling and use of nuclear weapons.

This, however, changed in the mid-1980s after the country was attacked with chemical weapons by neighbouring Iraq (Dunn Cavelty and Mauer 2010, p. 320). Later, Tehran found alternative energy partners: from 1995, Russia assisted Iran with the completion of a nuclear reactor at the Gulf port of Bushehr, which had been started with the help of West Germany in the 1970s.

The diplomatic crisis between Iran and the international community originated over the revelation in 2002 that Tehran had had a secret nuclear programme for over 18 years in violation of its NPT[1] obligations.[2] The international community accused Iran of the intention to develop nuclear weapons rather than electricity through its

Table 1. Discursive typologies towards Iran.

| Images | Textual elements | Nature of discourses and practices | Nature of European foreign policy |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. 'Iran as untrustworthy': (a) it has to regain confidence, and (b) unpredictable behaviour. | Sentences such as 'Iran has to regain confidence, demonstrate its good will ...' or 'it has turned its back to ...', as opposed to positive connotation of EU and international community: 'we went the extra mile'; 'we made a generous offer'; and 'we were in good faith', etc. | Dissatisfaction, complaint, verbal and non-verbal threats; coercive discourses, focus on the coercive dimension of the dual-track approach. | Coercive approach (securitised governance) |
| 2. 'Iran as semi-authoritarian': (a) HR violations; repression of political dissent. | Criticism of HR violations vs. Europe upholding HR principles. | Purely verbal dissent, no reference to even diplomatically coercive consequences. | Democracy promotion (politicised governance) |
| 3. 'Iranian rights and resources': (a) great civilisation; (b) political resilience; (c) population and oil; and (d) allies. | 'We want to engage with Iran on all levels'; 'we leave the negotiating door open'. | Focus on the diplomatic dimension of the dual-track approach. | Cultural diplomacy (non-politicised governance) |

uranium enrichment programme, thus aiming at the development of a military nuclear rather than civilian programme. For nearly two decades, Iran had enrichment-related and reprocessing activities which would enable it to produce fissile material for a nuclear weapon.[3]

Launched in December 2002, the negotiations over a TCA with the EU were suspended in 2003, because of lack of progress in several dossiers, including terrorism, human rights, the Arab–Israeli conflict and WMD. The nuclear dossier was the tipping element in that respect: significantly, the EU subjected its economic interests to its security concerns, speeding up a process of security mainstreaming leading to stronger prioritisation and a more coherent foreign policy among the different pillars of the Union. This was also a moment in which it was of pivotal importance for the EU to come up with an alternative approach to the unilateral tendencies of the Bush administration. It was so in two ways: as a late response to the EU internal crisis over the Iraq war and as a preventive move aimed at distancing the prospects of a military escalation between the USA and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The creation of an informal European 'contact group', alternative to American hegemony in terms of initiatives towards the Middle East, was thereby not just a tactical foreign policy move but a step of reinforcing a sense of identity in opposition

to the USA (Hill and Smith 2005, p. 173). Paraphrasing Vivien Schmidt, the way in which the Iranian nuclear issue was dealt with by the EU was a clear example of 'coordinative discourse', elaborated by the relevant policy actors seeking to coordinate agreement among themselves (Schmidt 2008, p. 308).

In the second half of 2003, with Italy holding the European Presidency, Great Britain, Germany and France formed an informal Directoire in charge of diplomatic negotiations with Tehran. As explained above, the trio was thought to represent the EU, given that the two EU nuclear powers and sole members of the UNSC were included, in addition to Iran's greatest economic partner, Germany.

Europe adopted a proactive stance in a unified manner: on 21 October 2003, Domenique de Villepin, Jack Straw and Joschka Fischer spoke with one voice for the EU when they declared they would make everything possible in order to avoid Iran becoming a nuclear state. Following suit from new security thinking exemplified by the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS) and the EU WMD strategy, non-proliferation policy was mainstreamed and negotiations over economic and trade agreements were suspended pending resolution of the nuclear issue impasse (Kile 2005).

Distancing itself from the US approach regarding the use of force in addressing non-proliferation challenges, the EU formulated a strategy of 'preventive engagement', firmly placed in the context of respecting international law and supporting the UN system.

In recognising that threats must be addressed, the ESS (Solana 2003, p. 8) sought to limit the possibility of using force:

> In contrast to the massive visible threat in the Cold War, none of the new threats is purely military; nor can any be tackled by purely military means. Each requires a mixture of instruments. Proliferation may be contained through export controls and attacked through political, economic and other pressures while the underlying political causes are also tackled.

The EU WMD strategy, the first comprehensive and integrated EU document addressing all aspects of non-proliferation, became the backbone of the EU's approach. Moreover, it was another example of coordinative discourse reinforcing Europe's sense of self-identity as a foreign policy actor since it was produced at a time of divisions over how to handle the alleged proliferating efforts in Iraq (Kienzle 2006), and it was thought of as an answer to what were perceived as securitised moves by the USA in considering pre-emptive strikes as legitimate counter-proliferation tools (Quille and Meier 2005).

Initially, the E3 approach was clear in its demands and diplomatic offers, acting with international institutions embodying Solana's call for 'effective multilateralism'. The European view was that the threat of sanctions was more powerful than sanctions themselves (Dunn Cavelty and Mauer 2010, p. 124). Within the second pillar, the view that coercive diplomacy enhances peace by preventing conflict had been forcefully supported by British diplomat Robert Cooper, one of the main authors of the ESS (Matlary 2009, p. 203). Initially this bore fruit: in October 2003, Iran signed an Additional Protocol with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the UN nuclear watchdog. Tehran accepted more intrusive inspections to all its nuclear installations, 'anytime', 'anywhere' (Everts 2003). Two days later, Tehran submitted a 'full declaration' about its nuclear programme to the IAEA. As a consequence of that, on 23 November 2003, the Agency came out with a mild

Resolution, deploring Iran's past failures and breaches but refraining from declaring Iran as 'non-compliant' (IAEA Board of Governors 2003). This was a result of the bridge-building exercise the EU performed in its shuttle diplomacy between Washington and Tehran (Sauer 2007, p. 618).

The restricted nature of the E3 left many in Brussels dissatisfied. The argument was that other voices within the Union were being ignored in formulating a security approach towards the Iranian nuclear issue, while consequences – such as economic sanctions – would have tied all EU member states (personal communication, Italian Embassy Tehran, February 2008). It is for this reason that in December 2003, thanks to Italian and other small member states' pressures (personal communications, Italian MFA, May 2007, Italian and German Representations in Tehran, February 2008), the CFSP High Representative, Javier Solana, was included in the negotiations format, transforming the E3 into the EU3. This was symbolised by Solana's Tehran visit in January 2004 to reinforce the achievements of the trio, thereby signalling the collective nature of policy implementation over collectively agreed issues (Ehteshami 2007, p. 65). The High Representative would conduct diplomatic negotiations with Tehran, reporting developments to the Political and Security Committee and to the European Parliament (Grant 2004).

By voluntarily suspending its enrichment process, the Khatami Government sought to establish better relations with the international community, defuse the risk of being referred to the UN and send a constructive signal by showing good will. This phase was characterised by appreciation and rapprochement. For example, then British Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, explained that part of the problem with Tehran had to do with British past domination of the region, especially with regard to the role of the UK in having contributed to putting the Shah back on the throne in 1953. The verbal gesture was not meant to appease Tehran, but rather to put in a broader historical context both bilateral relations and Iran's place in its geopolitical setting. Significantly, Straw added that: 'Iran is a very important country, it is a dominant player in the region so you can't ignore it' (Straw 2004). He underlined the injustices suffered by the Islamic Republic caused by neighbouring and international powers, especially grave in the eyes of the British Foreign Secretary, as international players interrupted a democratic experiment in the country, thereby heavily impacting upon subsequent dramatic events (dissatisfaction with the corrupted and un-democratic rule of the Shah, 1979 Revolution). In this and related speeches on Iran, Straw formulated an elaborate cultural diplomatic discourse (falling into the third analytical category). Elements of his discourse include a call for Western non-interference; a vision of what should be 'normal politics' (Christou *et al.* 2010, pp. 341–359) with Iran, where one recognises the responsibilities and mistakes of both sides. In other words, the appreciation of the Islamic Republic's history and merits shown by Straw strongly contrast with parallel calls for securitising the issue, considering it an existential threat to the Middle East, European and international security.

The EU3 proposed a new deal on 21 October 2004, including the start of broader negotiations, economic benefits and the delivery of light-water reactors. In a renewed climate of trust and hope, Jack Straw dismissed as 'inconceivable' prospects for a US-sponsored attack against Iran, emphasising the moment of opportunity in the Middle East (BBC News 2004). This second EU–Iran agreement was formally signed in Paris on 14 November 2004. Iran agreed to freeze its entire uranium enrichment programme until a long-term agreement was reached (IAEA 2004). The EU-linked

prospects for future EU–Iranian cooperation to the country's willingness to maintain the suspension (Posch 2006). Here the constructive and positive tone was articulated around expressions such as: 'We want durable, cooperative, long-term partnership with Iran. This agreement opens the way. Potentially it is the start of a new chapter in our relations. The negotiations over a TCA Trade and Cooperation agreement should resume' (Solana 2004).

At the same time the Council, in its Presidency Conclusions, made it crystal clear that the EU expected Tehran to continue building confidence vis-à-vis the international community, making explicit that it considered the regime's intentions associated to the nuclear ambition as important as the technical capacity to reach nuclear weaponisation (Council of the European Union November 2004). In the same declaration, a series of vague carrots were offered, including cooperation in the areas of trade, technology exchange and security, without, however, entering into details on their contents and implementation modalities. The distinction between intentions and capabilities is a central one in EU discourses, resurfacing over and over in official texts. Both elements weigh the same when evaluating the degree of threat the Iranian nuclear programme poses to the region and to the international community as a whole. But while a discourse on pure capabilities falls into a non-politicised realm and does not presuppose securitisation, a discourse mixing references to dangerous capabilities and to destabilising intentions manifested by an irresponsible leadership paves the way for a different mode of governance, distant from 'business as usual'. In other words, while never officially mentioned, the extreme politicisation of the Iranian dossier comes to a large extent as a consequence of how the nature of the regime in Tehran is perceived, its degree of rationality, accountability and respect of international law (Dunn Cavelty and Mauer 2010, pp. 319–327). In this sense, it is much more about political assessments over the ultimate goals nuclear weapons might have, rather than nuclear weapons per se. The perception of looming existential security threats takes over and securitisation imposes itself as the main paradigm framing the issue and the response to the crisis.

Subsequently, IAEA inspectors were not granted access to Natanz nuclear facilities. Since 2005, Iran had occasionally refused entry to IAEA inspectors, and more importantly, with the August 2005 electoral victory of Ahmadinejad against the widely expected success of Rafsanjani, the August 2004 European offer was rejected and the enrichment programme re-started. The tone of EU discourses hardened, underlying 'Iran's record of breaching safeguard obligations and failure to cooperate with the IAEA over a long period of time' and arguing in favour of 'full suspension' as precondition for talks over long-term arrangements on the basis of the Paris Agreement (Council of the EU August 2005). The European diplomatic community was taken by surprise by the hardliners' victory and their immediate rebuke of previous diplomatic agreements, and, while verbally leaving the soft diplomacy possibility on the table, Brussels made no further offers to the new regime in Tehran and slightly modified its linguistic orientation towards a more confrontational style. When the EU3 put forward the comprehensive proposal, German Foreign Minister, Joschka Fischer, was somehow softer in appealing to the leadership in Tehran, the only red line being the request not to complete the fuel cycle (Fischer 2005a). He asked Tehran to 'be reasonable' and 'choose not to fuel the danger of a nuclear arms race in the Middle East', a consideration he repeated some days later when he declared: 'If Iran were to go nuclear, it would jeopardise stability in the entire region.

This is not only Israel's concern, but also of all Iran's neighbours' (Fischer 2005b). Despite appearing objective in his considerations over the possible consequences of an eventual nuclear weaponisation, Fischer ignored Iranian security concerns and not necessarily aggressive regional ambitions (Hanau Santini and Mauriello 2008), and he portrayed the nature of the nuclear programme as inevitably destabilising the region. He attributed the responsibility of the Iranian nuclear obsession to the Iranian elites alone, without considering the broader context, i.e. the Iranian threat perception linked to the strong American military presence in bordering Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as Israel's nuclear arsenal. It is interesting to note how, while claiming to be a global normative power, the EU is asymmetrically and uni-directionally securitising this issue, taking into account only international and European security concerns while ignoring Iranian ones. In the same declaration, Fischer said he hoped 'Tehran would return to a rational policy' (Fischer 2005b), implicitly depicting the newly elected government as irrational and unforeseeable, failing to take into account the complex dynamics of domestic bargaining over the definition of national interests and the tactics to be employed to fulfil them. And also, by considering the leadership in Tehran as irrational, the German Foreign Minister was, perhaps unknowingly, enabling the view that only pre-emptive strikes, repeated every few years, are the only answer to counter the Iranian proliferation threat (Dalton 2008, p. 26).

A few days later, when Tehran rejected the offer and restarted uranium conversion at Isfahan, talks were halted. The foreign ministers of the Big Three plus Solana strongly condemned the unilateral decision to restart enrichment activities and the subsequent implications, notably the rejection 'without any serious consideration' of a detailed proposal for a long-term agreement (Douste-Blazy *et al.* 2005). On 22 September 2005, in a joint article appeared in the Wall Street Journal, the European Foreign ministers portrayed Europe as having made a qualitative leap in the proposed bilateral relationship, only to see it turned down by the leadership in Tehran, ungrateful and irresponsible. The sentences praising EU efforts range from 'We have pursued talks in good faith' to 'we decided to find a way forward . . .', pointing to a clear-cut positive image of European diplomacy, united and coherent. There is no acknowledgement of Iran's potential reasons for acquiring nuclear weapons, or of existing double standards in how nuclear and non-nuclear states are dealt with or how NPT members and non-members are internationally treated. In other words, there is no room for a nuanced picture rendering the complexity and intricacy of the issue at stake. Rather, a good European model-like citizen of the world ('we') vs. a characterisation of ambiguous, potentially harmful, opaque international behaviour of the Iranians ('they'). In the same vein, French Foreign Minister, Philippe Douste-Blazy, expressed several reservations over the alleged good faith manifested by Iranians, declaring he was hoping that the international community 'will show itself united and firm, in the face of a grave crisis, deliberately provoked by Iran' (Douste-Blazy 2005). By blaming Iran for the failure of striking a deal, rhetorically the move creates power asymmetry between the two sides and leaves the EU and the international community with the only viable option of a more decisive coercive diplomacy. Securitisation here is accomplished by portraying the behaviour of the actor violating international norms as impossible to change despite the creative and tireless international community diplomatic efforts. This representation of an irreducible actor refusing any compromise and rational

bargaining in its own interest (as defined by the West) paves the way for further securitising of how the issue is dealt with, with what language and with which policy implications. In the same interview, the French Foreign Minister underlined the good will and tireless efforts shown by the Union and threatened the realistic chance that the IAEA Board would refer the issue to the UNSC (Douste-Blazy 2005). Elements from the first discursive dimension are predominant here, especially in so far as the 'we' vs. 'them' dichotomous relationship is concerned, aimed at creating distance between good and bad international behaviour and providing justifications for harsher measures.

A different story is the one told by the European Parliament, which, in its October 2005 resolution on Iran (European Parliament 2005), gave a much more elaborate image of the inter-linkages and the multi-layered problematiques at stake. Two things are particularly noteworthy: in terms of contents, while the demarche followed by the Council was endorsed by the European Parliament and the EP openly advocated refrain from considering military options. Secondly, half of the resolution dealt with the human-rights situation in Iran, calling Iran to abide by international human-rights conventions. In other words, the Parliament maintained its discursive resilience, stressing the need for strengthening the EU's democracy promotion agenda, thereby formulating a politicised but non-securitised discourse. Namely, it is interesting to note that in the European Elites Survey conducted in 2006, interviewees preferred other options than those reflecting Bush administration policy: despite a widespread perception of a very significant threat, European public opinion and Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), by and large, rejected the option of military force, a possible last resort tool only for a third of the interviewees (European Elites Survey 2006, pp. 6–7). In the 2008 survey, a greater percentage of the general public than the elites supported ruling out the use of force in ensuring that Iran does not acquire nuclear weapons (51% of the general public and 45% of MEPs). Despite struggling to devise alternative pathways in case the Islamic Republic perseveres in the nuclear programme, a relatively strong consensus among European citizens and EU officials rejects the military option against Iran (European Elites Survey 2008, p. 7).

The second half of 2005 was characterised by an escalation between the IAEA and Iran, which led to the referral of the nuclear dossier to the UNSC in early 2006. Various IAEA resolutions were passed urging Iran to collaborate. Because those failed to compel cooperation and Iran had resumed uranium-enrichment activities, on 4 February 2006, the IAEA brought Iran's nuclear issue to the UN Security Council. In January, the EU3 came out with a statement detailing their diplomatic stance after Iran's uranium-enrichment resumption. Interestingly, the four diplomats expressed the claim of having been too generous with Iran by, among other things, not having reported the nuclear dossier to the UNSC sooner (EU3 Statement 2006). In their words, Iran did not deserve this benevolence, given its 'record of concealment and deception', now 'intent on turning its back on better relations with the international community' (EU3 Statement 2006).

In its conclusions of the 30 March meeting with Iran, the EU reiterated 'its serious concern' and 'urgently called' on Iran to 'convince' the international community of its peaceful intentions. Notwithstanding the absence of what Straw

had called a 'smoking gun', the burden to prove its innocence was placed upon Iran. The Union adopted less conciliatory tones and resorted to a more coercive language, albeit with some notable exceptions: in February 2006 Jack Straw expressed his 'understanding of the Iranian lack of trust towards the West', indicating especially 'the UK, Russia and the US in light of historical precedents', thereby proving his discursive resilience. He referred mainly, but not exclusively, to the UK–US masterminded coup against Iranian democratically elected Prime Minister, Mohammed Mossadeq, in 1953. The Foreign Secretary spoke of 'how isolated Iran feels in that Iran is not an Arab state', adding that, 'Iran feels over the last 100 years it has been humiliated by great powers' (Straw 2006). Straw demonstrated that he grasped Iran's sense of geopolitical isolation and the lack of a real ring of non-purely tactical allies, hinting at some sort of understandable but not necessarily justifiable – rationale behind the nuclear effort and the stubbornness with which it was pursued. A month later, when the UNSC started discussing Tehran's nuclear issue, the Foreign Secretary distinguished between, on the one hand, Iran and its people, and on the other, the regime in power, which was disappointing popular aspirations and damaging Iran's reputation. His discourse still underlined Iranian resources (the third discursive dimension): Iran's great history, the richness of its civilisation, the existence of a potentially unique media landscape and its geopolitical pivotal place in the Middle East. However, ambiguity came in due to a more complex discursive structure which listed positive traits alongside critical ones. By so doing, Jack Straw's previous homogenous cultural diplomatic discourse slightly shifted by incorporating a more confrontational tone, mirroring the one adopted by Ahmadinejad. In May 2006, the new British Foreign Secretary, Margaret Beckett, gave a different and less complex reading of the Iranian issue compared to her predecessor, arguing that while war was not on the agenda, sanctions were, since the Iranian regime had for too long 'flouted the will of the international community' (*The Independent* 2006). In this portrait, Iran was deprived of its specificity, of its historical legacies and its regional place and was dealt with almost as a rogue state. The EU and international community are represented as having to 'deal' with a pending security issue, in order to reassert common values and practices essential in their ordering and restructuring function within international politics.

In early 2006, the EU3 was enlarged to the USA, Russia and China in another move aimed at gaining more international legitimacy for the ad hoc negotiating team. As a consequence, the format changed from the EU3 to the EU3+3 or UN Permanent 5+1 (Germany). After having convinced the USA to collaborate in the joint diplomatic effort in May, in mid-June 2006, the EU3+3 formulated a proposal in Vienna including trade concessions and assistance with Iran's civilian nuclear programme in exchange for which Tehran would stop the enrichment process of uranium and resume implementation of the Additional Protocol.

German Foreign Minister Steinmeier articulated an optimist orientation after having submitted the new package deal to Tehran, confident that the entry of the USA into the contact group, the wider benefits involved in negotiations, and the clear Solana rhetoric between 'cooperation' and 'confrontation' conveyed to Tehran would yield results. At the same time, confirming the coercive nature of EFP vis-à-vis Iran, Steinmeier refused to rule out economic sanctions as a further means to put

pressure on the regime, reiterating his conviction that this stick is the most feared one in Tehran. Indeed, he declared:

> If we presume that Iran is very much dependent on economic cooperation with the West and if we want to move Iran in a certain direction, then we must not be too hasty in ruling out any options. (Di Lorenzo and Ulrich 2006)

The dispassionate tone vis-à-vis the evolution of the dossier somehow contrasted with Steinmeier's honest political and strategic evaluations over the flaws and double standards allowed by the NPT. But when it became clear that the Islamic Republic had no intention of accepting the proposal, in July 2006 the UNSC started to draft a resolution, which, endorsed 31 July of the same year, required Iran to suspend enrichment by the end of August 2006 or face a subsequent resolution and economic sanctions. Within the UNSC, the UK and France, often accused of having an instrumental approach at the UN and showing a low level of Brusselisation – exemplifying the low intensity of European decision-making on UN issues (Jorgensen 2009, pp. 37–40) – perfectly coordinated their efforts. This was also a consequence of the EU WMD Strategy, which paved the way for the centrality of the UN Security Council and IAEA to non-proliferation issues for all EU Member States. This meant in practice that despite divergences (in 2006 and 2007 criticisms were levelled at IAEA for being too lenient) the EU and the UN forged a joint strategy. More than using the UN to enhance its influence, the EU was acting to preserve international law (Jorgensen 2009, pp. 46–47).

A few months later, the EU foreign policy chief exemplified his view to the European Parliament (Solana 2006): at the heart of the matter there was 'a problem of confidence' due to Iran's lack of transparency, as opposed to the dialogic, generous and hard-working international community. In his words:

> The problem with Iran is essentially a problem of confidence. For many years Iran, a signatory to the NPT, carried out nuclear activities with a total lack of transparency. This is a legitimate source of concern for the international community as recognised by the Iranians themselves... The six countries have followed a two track approach: dialogue and referring the case to the UN Security Council. Dialogue could not last forever. It is up to them to decide whether the time has come to follow the second track. But the door to negotiations is always open.

The rhetorical use of 'we' vs. 'them' here was more nuanced as the concluding paragraph shows:

> Iran is an old, wise nation. A key partner in regional and world affairs. The nuclear issue is just one element, even if it is a key one, of a much broader relationship. We want to cooperate with Iran in other subjects, not least the Middle East, and we should do irrespective of the ups and downs in the nuclear issue. (Solana 2006, p. 2)

The mix between the first and the third discursive themes, albeit in a poorly balanced way, testifies to the deeper understanding acquired by the High Representative over years of negotiations, contacts and exchanges with Iranian negotiators Rohani, then Larjani and Jalili. While it seems clear that the High Representative got acquainted with Iranian negotiators and demands and appreciated the country's role and aspirations (elements forming the third discursive theme), as well as paying attention to domestic variables of interest to the European Parliament (human rights, typically

from the second discursive theme), the emphasis on coercion remains predominant and overarching. Solana tries to strike all chords: cultural diplomacy in calling for continuing dialogue in other fields despite the nuclear dispute, a politicised approach in supporting the EP call for a stronger democracy promotion agenda, and securitisation in asymmetrically asking Iran to comply with international demands, proving its good faith, demonstrating to be more similar to the EU as a political actor, in a strongly normatively connoted way.

At the end of 2006, the Iranian leadership publicly rejected the Vienna proposal and the EU declared it was considering sanctions within the UN framework. In the December 2006 Presidency Conclusions, paving the way for a more coercive foreign policy, the EU stated that:

> In the absence of action by Iran to meet its obligations, the European Council supports work in the Security Council towards the adoption of measures under Article 41 of Chapter VII of the UN Charter. (Council Presidency Conclusion, 14–15 December 2006, p. 26)

The first UN sanctions resolution, UNSCR 1737, was passed on 23 December 2006 after weeks of angry debate, with the Russian delegation particularly resistant to taking firm measures, citing again the failure of the sanctions regime against Iraq in the 1990s (Gottemoeller 2007, pp. 99–110). Disagreements between the USA and Russia over the necessity and the extent to which Tehran should be sanctioned coupled with Chinese pressures, watered down the final text. Resolution 1737 demanded that Iran 'shall without further delay suspend proliferation-sensitive nuclear activities'. Until compliance, Resolution 1737 blacklisted 10 Iranian entities and 12 individuals with ties to Iran's nuclear or ballistic missile programmes, it banned the supply of nuclear-related technology and materials, and called on countries to report travel into their territory by Iranian officials involved in that programme.

In March 2007, EC External Relations Commissioner, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, in a speech to the plenary of the European Parliament (Ferrero-Waldner 2007), offered an insight into the official Commission approach to the Iranian issue. While expressing concern vis-à-vis Iran, as was expected, the Commissioner voiced her concern over the present and the future prospect of non-proliferation in general, making reference also to developments with North Korea. She then detailed and praised the degree of involvement of the European Commission in this issue area, especially the non-proliferation assistance programmes. This speech set a different tone vis-à-vis the prevailing ones in the Council and by the EU3. Here, neither contingent events nor political endeavours and frenetic diplomatic activities are at the centre stage. No reference is made to exceptional threats being directed at Europe and the international community by rogue-behaving Iran, and no securitisation speech is formulated framing the best way to address the pending show-down. Non-proliferation is dealt with as a technical matter, a best practice to be taught and transferred and a task for which the first pillar is ideally suited. Clearly the Commission, following the suspension of negotiations over a TCA with Iran has been a marginal player vis-à-vis Tehran.

Sanctions were beefed-up in March 2007 with UNSC Resolution 1747, submitted by France, Germany and the UK. This resolution imposed a ban on arms sales and targeted in particular the Revolutionary Guard Corps, a clear example of smart

sanctions.[4] Iran was asked to suspend enrichment by May 2007. In the June 2007 Council Presidency Conclusions, Iran 'is urged to engage constructively' and the 'Council deplores the fact that Iran has not complied yet with UNSC Resolution 1747' (Council of the EU 2007). The unreliability of Iran as a partner becomes the justification to deal with on an asymmetric basis, urging desired behaviours, threatening harsher courses of actions, but, eventually, failing to offer a partnership where there is a deal of real interest to both parties.

In July 2007, the new British Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, argued that 'Iran has no right to undermine the stability of its neighbours' (*BBC News* 2007), thereby deciding to consider the issue from the vantage point of potential effects rather than its originating causes and complex evolution. British diplomacy, from Straw to Beckett to Miliband, did espouse a more and more coercive and securitised approach, distancing itself from the well-balanced discourse of Jack Straw, uniting first and third discursive themes, and abiding more strictly to the first theme without many nuances. Distinguishing itself from its European counterparts, British diplomacy under Straw had espoused a politicised but non-securitised frame of the Iranian nuclear programme, a nuance which afterwards 'got lost'.

French Foreign Minister, Bernard Kouchner, signalled the adoption of a similarly stronger language when declaring that 'France needed to prepare for the prospect of war with Iran', a statement he had to correct later by adding that his was a 'message of peace' (Baldwin 2007). The former founder of Médécins sans Frontières spoke in favour of harsher sanctions, along the line of the American unilateral ones targeting the Iranian banking and economic system. Interestingly, he also declared that 'the system to avoid war is sanctions', adding that, 'If there is a new UN resolution, we will be happy about it. If there is not, we will build sanctions in any case' (Baldwin 2007), clearly setting higher standards for the game at play and fully securitising the issue.

If one wanted to sum up the recent history of relations between the EU and Iran, one could name the discursive evolution from critical dialogue, to constructive engagement, dual track diplomacy, sanctions, to potential prospects of military escalations. The securitisation move is almost completed. War has become a possibility on the table. One that normative Europe is desperately trying to avoid, even resorting to the adoption of sanctions, a coercive measure known to have some efficacy only under certain conditions. Interestingly, also, when the discourse moves to the end of the securitisation spectrum, Iran as a particular actor, with its features, its demands, its context, disappears from the picture and what is left are only seemingly objective considerations and 'matter-of-fact assessment'.

In November 2007, the US National Intelligence Council concluded with confidence that Iran had terminated its nuclear weapons programme in the fall of 2003. This, however, fell short of convincing the Bush administration that these findings were trustworthy, and sanctions were reinforced with UNSC Resolution 1803 in March 2008, calling for a financial freeze of individuals assets deemed to be involved in the nuclear programme as well as increasing vigilance over two Iranian banks found to be connected to the proliferation efforts. Moreover, the Resolution extended financial sanctions to additional entities and travel bans to additional persons, called on member states to inspect cargo bound to or from Iran, and urged countries to be cautious in providing trade incentives and guarantees to Iran.

The linguistic shift in the mainstream representation of the nuclear issue, its stalemate and Iran was further demonstrated by David Miliband's depiction of the role of the Islamic Republic 'as a source of instability in the region' being 'undoubtedly a concern' (*The Sunday Times* 2008), ignoring or failing to mention certain responsible behaviour by the regime in Tehran over the last decade (the stabilisation role Iran has played vis-à-vis Afghanistan or in restraining its influence in the Shia majority Iraq).

In January 2008, when Solana spoke to the EP on Iran, his mixture of the first discursive coercive theme and the third culturally centred theme was again apparent:

> 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 . . . 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. (Solana 2008)

At the same time, the European Parliament adopted a resolution (European Parliament 2008) advocating further sanctions but calling on the USA to renounce rhetoric on military options and regime change against Tehran. The EP, as in all previous occasions, elaborates the wider and most comprehensive discourse on Iran, including human-rights aspects, cultural cooperation and Iranian security concerns. In a balanced but decisive way, the EP called for sanctions but for the continuation of the dual-track approach whereby diplomacy remains the first and only option. The EP then manages to stick to the second discursive theme despite having incorporated some of the stick approach espoused by the EU3.

In June 2009, an updated version of the Vienna proposal was put forward by the EU3+3 to Iran. This is the same offer that is still on the table. At the end of September 2009, David Miliband came full circle from where British diplomacy vis-à-vis Iran started with Jack Straw, by stating that he 'refused to rule out the prospect of military action against Iran over its nuclear ambitions' (Borger *et al.* 2009), while Obama called on Iran to allow IAEA inspectors to visit the Qom plant or otherwise face sanctions 'that bite'.

With the partial opening by Tehran to cooperate with the IAEA on its Qom facilities, after disclosures concerning a second uranium-enrichment plant in September, on 1 October 2009 HR Solana met with his Iranian counterpart Saeed Jalili in Geneva. The meeting took place after a 15 months pause in discussions. For the first time the US participated actively in the meeting. After the inconclusive meeting and mounting tensions, French Foreign Minister Kouchner revealed that the international community is aware of Israel's possibility to carry out a pre-emptive strike against Iranian nuclear facilities (Blair 2009). Kouchner implied that European and international diplomacies ought to act quickly if they want to avoid Israeli military actions. The understandable fear of a regional escalation is portrayed as being caused by Iran only, as if the Islamic Republic was in a vacuum within the region. And while the IRI is represented as an international spoiler or a revisionist regime threatening peace and security on a regional and global level, the EU becomes a policeman by proxy patrolling the Middle East in order to avoid a war,

without, however, putting forward a political vision of a new Middle East security architecture and prospects for discussing new security guarantees for all its members.

## Conclusion

Negotiations over the Iranian nuclear programme have now been ongoing for over 7 years, first launched by three European powers, shortly after followed by the High Representative for the Common and Foreign Security Policy, Javier Solana, representing the whole EU, and joined after 2 years by the USA, Russia and China. As the first negotiator, the EU was in the position to set the tone of the diplomatic endeavour vis-à-vis the Islamic Republic of Iran. Three partly overlapping but different discourses emerged from the start: one underlining the dangers posed by an aggressive and often seemingly irrational Iranian foreign policy, one focusing on Iranian domestic concerns, especially human-rights violations and the last stressing Iranian resources and demands, from its great civilisation to its geopolitical perceptions. Each discourse bore consequences for EFP vis-à-vis Iran: strong coercive diplomacy and securitisation of the issue in the first case, democracy promotion and engagement with civil society in the second and cultural diplomacy and search for a more comprehensive approach taking into account also Iranian security concerns in the third.

While the first discursive theme emerged from the start as the most powerful in terms of representing a mainstream securitised position within the EU as well as being tacitly endorsed by the USA, the second and third themes somehow watered down or slowed down the policy implications of the coercive discourse. The European Parliament was the clear representative of the second theme, articulating a politicised and elaborate discourse. However, not being directly involved in the formulation of EFP, the EP was unable to strongly influence EFP, while the third dimension – the farthest from coercion – was present in foreign policy formulations by British Foreign Minister Straw and to some extent by the HR Solana.

The first discursive theme became hegemonic at the EU level with the departure of British Foreign Minister Straw, who had consistently opposed any prospect of military intervention against Iran. At the discursive level, Iran as a complex domestic and foreign policy actor disappeared from the analysis, while the discourse repeated claims on the regional and international dangerous consequences of the nuclear programme without substantiating them. On the policy level, this enabled a full securitisation logic to take hold, with the dichotomic depiction of an aggressive and irrational actor as opposed to a peaceful and restrained international community and Europe.

In terms of modes of security governance, the changes from E3 to EU3 to EU3 + 3 represented the shift towards an official collegial decision-making approach, which failed to translate into any discursive change. While the stances of Russia and China distanced themselves from the North American discourse with regard to sanctions and other coercive measures to be adopted, the intra-EU consensus reached on the first discursive theme, perfectly aligned with Washington, remained unchanged and refrained from incorporating other external discursive elements, be they from Iranian, Russian or Chinese discourses. Within the EU level, however, the EU3 has represented a positive example of security governance in so far as it: has allowed the EU-27 to find a common ground, speak with one voice and elaborate its own sense of identity in foreign policy before being forced to align with other

international players' actions. It also allowed the EU to maintain consistency in its external relations with Iran, from all points of view, mainstreaming security as the first dimension indicating the nature of relations with a third country. Of course, it remains to be seen to what extent EFP formulation has been autonomous with respect to American policy preferences towards the Iranian nuclear issue, which might have been internalised well before the three discursive themes played out one against the other.

Lastly, it is important to point out what the implications of the analysis in terms of 'normative power Europe', a claim the EU generally makes in its foreign policy and that was characteristic also of the way in which the EU depicted itself vis-à-vis Iran, since, as argued by Christou *et al.* (2010, p. 18): 'This "self-image", underpinned by clear EU values, impacts not only on the way in which EU security is constructed, but also on how it is performed and projected in practice'. It is namely interesting to look at the kind of impact brought about by EU normativity, by and large consistently (both among pillars as well as among EU member states) deployed in all its relations with Iran since the beginning of the diplomatic crisis. From what we have seen, it is clear that at least three factors have hampered the success of the EU's policy: firstly, the kind of foreign policy normativity the EU has adopted has progressively led to a black and white approach, unable to subsume different readings and interpretations of the stalemate and of Iranian reactions, both formulated within the EU (Jack Straw, and to a lesser extent, Javier Solana), and externally by Russia and China. The main reason for this Manichean approach is probably the EU's need to be seen as a credible actor on the world stage, reacting to hard security threats before being dragged into other actors' policies (the Iraq experience). Secondly, the EU has also proven unable to address regional players real security concerns (apart from Israeli ones), from Iran, Gulf countries, Egypt and other relevant key regional stakeholders. For several reasons (some EU member states' colonial past, the presence of the USA as an inevitable security actor in the region), the Union has so far refrained from elaborating a political and strategic vision of the Middle East in terms of regional dynamics. Thirdly, by framing its coercive approach as 'normative', the EU became discursively exclusivist, unable to relate to different discourses and setting the terms not just on how to address this security issue but also on how it should be talked about. This has distorted the nature of diplomatic negotiations, which have quickly developed asymmetrically, with Europe as 'the good' actor and Iran as 'The Other', being acknowledged as good only to the extent to which it would comply and conform to Europe's demands both on a policy level as well as accepting the EU normative discourse. By having linked its normative discourse to a securitised approach, while having gained internal and external consistency on the policy formulation (in terms of modes of security governance), its security governance architecture has been weakened by this poisonous discursive and practical association. While problem-solving is namely part of how security governance is conceptualised, securitising an issue, cognitively closing off alternative readings and interpretations might change the nature of EFP and seriously undermine its normativity claims.

## Notes

1. The NPT entered into force in 1970 and its role is to safeguard and promote the use of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes, while promoting the eventual elimination of

nuclear weapons. Its safeguards are implemented by the IAEA, which was established in 195 (Dunn Cavelty and Mauer 2010, p. 146).
2. This revelation was made public by an exile group, the National Council of Resistance of Iran. See 'Group: Iran's Nuke Program Growing', *New York Times*, 15 August 2002.
3. Most countries having nuclear power reactors have not developed a fuel-cycle industry and sign supply contracts with external providers. The unnecessary nature of having on its soil these facilities has been one of the main elements arousing international suspicion.
4. On smart sanctions: 'Sanctions targeting political elites in a way that closes off escape routes for them and forces them to bear the pain. Smart sanctions are also designed to protect vulnerable groups, preventing "collateral damage" by exempting products such as food and medical supplies' (Gottemoeller 2007, p. 4).

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