Thank you Mme Chair,

If we look around us, and we do it quite consistently today, we see a dangerous world indeed. Tensions risk to rise around the Holy Places of Jerusalem – we will discuss this in the next debate; Da’esh has been defeated in Iraq, but the war in Syria is not over yet; Egypt has just suffered one of the worst terrorist attacks in its history; the war in Yemen is getting worse by the day; and in the Korean peninsula, to look a little bit further but to a security challenge that is potentially affecting all of us, nuclear proliferation is a reality.

Against this background, preserving and implementing the nuclear deal with Iran is an absolute must. We simply cannot afford more tension in the Middle East and another nuclear proliferation crisis. We cannot afford to undermine the credibility of a multilateral agreement, endorsed by the UN Security Council Resolution, and we cannot afford to dismantle a deal that works and delivers on its promises.

The deal with Iran is ensuring the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme. This is vital for our collective security – in the European Union, in the region and beyond. And this is even more important as we face a nuclear crisis with North Korea.

With the nuclear deal with Iran, we have established the strongest monitoring system ever set up. The International Atomic Energy Agency has reported nine times that Iran is implementing all its nuclear-related commitments.

It took us twelve years of extremely difficult negotiations, led by the European Union, to achieve
these results. Renegotiating the deal or part of it is simply not an option – no one can possibly in good faith believe that this is a credible way to follow.

After President Trump’s announcement on a new US strategy towards Iran, we Europeans have made our position very clear. Preserving the deal is our shared security interest, and the best way for the United States to address their security concerns which are also ours, is in close cooperation with us, Europeans.

We Europeans share many of our America friends’ preoccupations regarding the regional situation and Iran’s ballistic missile programme, which is inconsistent with the UN Security Council Resolution 2231. This is why we still have some targeted sanctions and an arms embargo in place.

But these issues should not be mixed up with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action – the nuclear deal - and must be addressed in the appropriate formats and fora. Dismantling a nuclear agreement that is working would not put us in a better position to discuss all the rest – the contrary would happen.

In fact, this is what we always do in our contacts with Iran. Discussing all the issues we have on the table, from cooperation to the difficult ones, including regional issues. On November 20th we held the latest EU-Iran High Level Dialogue, and as you know, I meet regularly with Foreign Minister [Mohammad Javad] Zarif. For more than two years now, we have built a very frank relationship with Iran: we are always open about our disagreements, and there are many, and we always try to find the best way to address them.

This approach has also driven our conversations on human rights. We still have substantive disagreements, but together with Iran we have agreed to focus on tangible results.

For example, we welcome the recent adoption by Teheran of the revised Anti-Narcotics Law. If properly implemented, it could lead to a significant drop in the number of executions of drug offenders in Iran. At the last High Level Dialogue I just mentioned, a few weeks ago, there was also agreement to continue our engagement on women empowerment and on the treatment of prisoners.

We have also agreed to look into possibilities for cooperation on the fight against drugs and on migration. Let me remind us all that Iran has played and continues to play an important role in hosting millions of Afghan refugees and we are ready to increase our common work and support in this field.

Since we reached the nuclear deal, our engagement with Iran has entered into a new phase, not always easy as I mentioned - there are a lot of issues of disagreements - but definitely a new phase.

Trade between Iran and Europe increased 94 percent in the first half of 2017, compared to the first half of 2016. Oil exports have reached pre-sanctions level, and billions of outstanding oil debts have been paid back. Foreign Direct Investment is increasing, and the Iranian government reported a growth of 55 percent compared to the previous year.

Progress in the financial and banking sector has been slower due to a number of factors. But important work is being carried out to improve the situation - also including on the Iranian side.

Civil nuclear cooperation is also integral part of the deal - and let me stress here, as the debate refers to the Iran nuclear deal, I am focusing here on the implementation of the deal and all the nuclear related parts of it. Obviously, I would be very pleased to have another debate today to address all the issues that are not covered under the nuclear deal, and that are issues that we address and that we believe need to be addressed in our relations and our talks with Iran, I think of the war in Syria, the
conflict in Yemen – even if I touched upon some of the bilateral issues we are working on.

Our civil nuclear cooperation makes the nuclear deal more solid through increased transparency. The second high-level seminar on civilian nuclear cooperation just took place in Esfahan and concrete cooperation activities are being rolled out.

This cooperation is important for us, Europeans, and even more for the people of Iran. And I would like us all to remember the images of young Iranians - girls, boys, but not only young people - celebrating the deal in the streets of Teheran. I believe that we have the responsibility to show these people and the Iranian leadership, that they have an interest in making Iran more open and more cooperative, that this brings benefits to the leadership and to the people - especially to the people. It is their interest, and it is our own interest.

The deal with Iran prevented a nuclear escalation in the Middle East. It showed that diplomacy is the best way to overcome longstanding problems that sometimes seem impossible to solve. This is something that we have not forgotten. This is why we believe that a diplomatic but critical engagement with Iran can benefit the entire Middle East, and prevent a regional escalation that would destabilise the whole world.

In this complicated moment for the region and for the world, let me say that the European Parliament has taken part of the responsibility for our collective security and I am grateful for that.

I would like to thank you for your contacts with the US Congress, and I will also mention the visit of the Delegation for Relations with Iran to the country – always in an excellent cooperation and coordination with me and with all our teams who are working on these files. I think we showed teamwork and that the European Institutions, across the board, including the European Parliament, that to me plays an essential role in the European foreign policy, manage to – as we always refer to - speak with one voice and pass the same message. Then, when the message is passed by different players, across the European institutions, the message becomes louder and clearer.

So, let me thank you once again for your cooperation over the last weeks and months, and let me also say that I believe we will need even more this kind of cooperation in the weeks and months ahead which will be probably also difficult. The work is not over but I think that we are doing what needs to be done. Thank you, once again, for your determined work.

Link to the video:

**Closing remarks**

Let me clarify a couple of things that most of you, indeed, have underlined but I think they might need to be usefully remembered for others.

First of all, the purpose of the nuclear deal with the Iran - and the name says it very clearly - is nuclear and only nuclear. Was this a right and wise choice or not? It was taken 14 years ago at the beginning of the negotiations and I do not believe I disclose a secret if I say that it was the Gulf countries' decision and the American administration’s decision at that time to limit the negotiations to purely nuclear issues. It was Iran at that time insisting on having a negotiation that would have included other aspects. Was it a wise choice or not? Not for me - or for you, probably - to judge it today, but the decision back then - not by Iran by the way - was of a different kind.

And being purely nuclear, we have facts that are certified by an agency, the IAEA [International
Atomic Energy Agency] - that has proven to be crucial and will continue to be crucial in other nuclear proliferation issues -, certifying that nuclear commitments of the nuclear deal have been met, constantly. And it would not be wise to weaken the credibility of the agency, of the IAEA; when a few months from now, a few years from now, we will need to push for the IAEA to enter and monitor other nuclear programmes - hopefully. So if the agency testifies, certifies nine times - after inspections and after technical work that needs to be happening in full independence and there are no political argumentations for that on all sides - that the nuclear commitments under the nuclear agreement are met, the deal is working. Full stop. That is a fact.

Then, second, does this mean that we are positive about Iran? That we trust Iran? That there is optimism about the atmosphere?

It is exactly because it is a country like Iran that you need to have a nuclear deal with Iran. Because you do not want a country like Iran in that region to develop a nuclear weapon. If it was Switzerland, maybe, we would be in a different position. So it is not about being naive - it is the contrary. It is the lack of trust that makes the deal indispensable. And this was the reasoning during all the years of negotiations. And this was the reason why the US administration - not having diplomatic relations with Iran, which is something that on the contrary most of the European Union Member States have - decided to engage on this at that time. And by the way, there is one fundamental argument that some of you have raised. If we start saying that at any change of administration agreements and international commitments are put into question, we are not making ourselves a favour - because nobody would accept negotiating any agreements - any international agreements - with any administration of the future or of the present. In Latin we say: pacta sunt servanda. That is the basis of any legal system of the world.

So, it is exactly because there is and there was no trust that an agreement was needed. Then, it is true: not in an article of agreement - I know it almost by heart by now - but in the preamble, there is a reference - half of a sentence - that says something like: this agreement could open the way, could put the basis for a different kind of engagement, a more constructive engagement in the region. And that sentence - here maybe I disclose a secret - was introduced on Iran's request. Because the Iranian leadership at the time - which is the same that has been re-confirmed today - intended to use the agreement as a way to ask their own population, their own public opinion, for a mandate to engage with the rest of the world, in a political battle, which inside Iran - you know very well - has happened and will continue to happen. And some of you referred to the fact that undermining the full implementation of the nuclear deal also weakens those in Iran's political scene that are trying to commit in their own way - which is not ours - towards an opening and an engagement with the rest of the world.

Weakening or putting into question the JCPOA is a way to strengthen the hardliners in the political scene in Iran. Is it convenient for us? Not for us. Not for us for sure. Having said that, what would happen if the deal was not there? Imagine that tomorrow the deal was not there anymore. Would the human rights situation in Iran improve? Probably not. On the contrary, hardliners will be stronger. Would the regional behaviour of Iran improve? For sure not. Would the Iranian nuclear programme continue to be monitored? No. Would the IAEA have the means to be in the country? No. Would we be sure that Iran would not develop a nuclear program that is purely peaceful? Definitely not! And enrichment would go up again - tomorrow. So, is it convenient to keep the nuclear deal in place? Yes. This is the simple - very simple - argumentation that is keeping the entire world committed to the full implementation of the JCPOA.

And I am confident that also the United States of America will continue to stay committed to the full implementation of the JCPOA. This is what we discussed with Secretary [of the United States, Rex] Tillerson last week in Brussels. And this is the message we got from him: We are continuing to
implement the agreement.

And just these days, in Vienna, the Secretary General of the EEAS, Helga Schmid - who has played a crucial role in these negotiations together with an excellent team from the European Union side-, is chairing at deputies' level the Joint Commission of the JCPOA. Once again. We do it regularly, sometimes at ministerial level - we did it last time in September [in New York] with all the parties around the table.

So, I believe it is a matter of convenience. It is not a matter of being naive or liking a system or a country, on the contrary.

Two points I would like to clarify. One is related to the agreement: there is no sunset clause in the agreement. I know this is often referred to. Read all the 104 pages of the agreement - there is no sunset clause to the agreement. The agreement has different provisions - many different provisions - with many different durations. Most of them last for a long, long, long time. Most of them last forever. And in the very beginning of the agreement there is the most important commitment taken by Iran - forever - of never developing a nuclear weapon. And this is a commitment that is there forever, as an NPT [Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons] party. So let's stick to the facts - the Nuclear Deal, the nuclear commitment fulfilled more safety in the region and for us. That is why I said to our American friends that this is a matter of strategic relevance for the European security. Is not about business, it is not about region, it is about security. Because we do not want to see in that region - that is already troubled enough - a nuclear arms race. We just miss that. We just miss that, and then good luck with North Korea. If we dismantle the only working deal on non-proliferation in the nuclear field, I want to see how we manage to solve peacefully the nuclear proliferation crisis that is currently ongoing. And we have one deal that is preventing nuclear proliferation and we want to dismantle it? We must be crazy. So I think - and I'm confident - that we can continue to work to ensure that Iran continues to fulfil, at full, its commitments under the deal. That is the key point, that is the key point.

The last point I would like to mention is on human rights, because it hurts me enormously when I hear voices saying we stay silent on human rights. Actually, we are the ones who are more vocal on human rights when it comes to Iran. Look at President Trump's speech, look at the American discourse on death penalty and compare it with the credibility on death penalty Europe has. Sorry to be blunt, but we have entered into a time where diplomacy has a different language. We are the ones raising individual cases and we do it even today in Vienna - issues were raised on individual cases.

We are the ones having started a human rights dialogue with Iran that regularly takes place. We are the ones - not others - and we are the ones raising this issue constantly. I do not see many others - I don't see others - doing this. We never, never, never avoid raising issues on human rights because of other reasons. We always do that constantly and consistently. And sometimes - most of the time - we are the only ones. So at least let's support the work we do and let's recognise the work we do. So, that is going to continue to be a very important aspect of our engagement with the country.

But again, I would say the most, most, most important one - for me - is the social and the political dynamics inside the country. The Iranian population that was celebrating the Iran deal - not because of nuclear issues, but because that was representing the opportunity to open up the country to international engagement.

And that is the investment that is smart to do as Europeans. And that is why I would like to thank this hemicycle in its vast majority and the parliamentary delegations that travelled, both in Iran and Washington, to support what is a fully united European Union position. The entire world is looking at us to guarantee that the full implementation of the agreement continues, by all sides.
Thank you.

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