

# ELIAMEP Briefing Notes

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## Nuclear Politics: Is Iran ready to compromise with the West?

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*Summary: The main idea of this note is that, under the impact of western sanctions, Iran is willing to negotiate and compromise in order to consolidate a modus vivendi with the West in regard to its nuclear programme. Such a development, however, will not involve an overall agreement on its controversial nuclear programme.*

On 14 April the new round of talks in Istanbul between Iran and the P5+1 Group on Tehran's controversial nuclear programme marked a breakthrough in the diplomatic stalemate since October 2011. Interestingly enough these talks occurred amid ongoing and growing heavy economic sanctions on Iran. Contrary to previous years, this meeting was hailed by the West with optimism. In the aftermath of the meeting the head of the Israeli Defense Forces claimed with optimism that a diplomatic solution could be reached in regard to the Iranian nuclear programme. On its part, a low profiled Iran participated and extended the level of negotiations to the IAEA level. Is there any reason to believe that an agreement is within sight?

Contrary to the negative atmosphere after the October 2011 meetings, in recent months Washington and other major Western powers have been quite active and eager to resume talks with Tehran. What has changed? According to the West, it is the impact of economic sanctions on crippling Iranian economy that could make Iran compromise. Holding such a meeting at this moment enables the West to approach Iran and reinstate negotiations warning Tehran that if the negotiations fail, then a new round of sanctions will follow.

Similarly Tehran is aware of the fact that in terms of time the West is in the middle of the sanctions process. So far many measures have been taken against Iranian economy. Yet many more and stronger in nature could be taken in the coming months. Indeed, under the impact of the growing sanctions, Iran has been forced to change its diplomatic attitude. Whilst in the past Tehran set the halting of sanctions as a precondition for the resumption of talks, now it participates in the new round of talks in order to delay or annul sanctions. By participating in these negotiations Tehran attempts to create the impression that it is at least considering the prospect of compromising with the West. The fact that these talks are expected to be held in four rounds, the next one on 23 May in Baghdad, is a gain for Tehran in order to slow down sanctions.

The fact that Tehran has changed its diplomatic stance to the West denotes that the sanctions already have an effect on Iranian economy. Yet it is uncertain whether this effect is serious enough to force Tehran to compromise. Iran views this change of course as an opportunity to walk in the path of a future compromise but after prolonged negotiations and aiming to reverse the policy of sanctions. In 2003 Iran had postponed temporarily the uranium enriching programme in order to buy time. This scenario could be repeated in the forthcoming months in order to have sanctions partially lifted. The current desideratum for Iran is reaching a consensus, not an overall agreement. The latter is not expected to take place anytime soon.

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