

EIR's interview med Irans ambassadør i Danmark, H.E. Hr. Morteza Moradian om Irans relationer med Rusland og Kina, og Irans rolle i Den Nye Silkevej efter P5+1 aftalen med Iran (på engelsk og persisk)

Interviewet, som EIR's Tom Gillesberg lavede, fandt sted den 15. marts 2016 i København. Ambassadøren talte på persisk, som blev oversat til engelsk.

English:

Interview with Iran's ambassador to Denmark, H.E. Mr. Morteza Moradian about Iran's relations with Russia and China, and Iran's role in the New Silk Road, after the P5+1 agreement with Iran. The interview was conducted on March 15, 2016 in Copenhagen, Denmark by EIR's Copenhagen Bureau Chief Tom Gillesberg. Ambassador Moradian spoke Farsi, and his statements were translated into English.

Audio:

Interview with H.E. Mr. Morteza Moradian, the ambassador from the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Kingdom of Denmark, about Iran's relationship with Russia and China, and Iran's role in the New Silk Road, from a vantage point after the P5+1 agreement with Iran. The interview was conducted on March 15,

2016 in Copenhagen, Denmark by EIR's Copenhagen Bureau Chief Tom Gillesberg. Ambassador Moradian spoke in Farsi, and his statements were translated into English. Video and audio files are available at: <http://schillerinstitut.dk/si/?p=12299>

EIR: Mr. Ambassador, thank you so much for agreeing to this interview, to give us an opportunity to hear what Iran's views are on some extremely important questions, not only for Iran, but, I think, for the whole Middle East region, and, also, for the world. When Chinese President Xi was in the Islamic Republic of Iran, there was a lot of discussion with President Hassan Rouhani, and others, and agreements signed, aimed at reviving the ancient Silk Road, which the Chinese call the "One Belt, One Road." Greek Prime Minister Tsipras was also in Teheran, and spoke about Greece's role as a bridge between Europe and Iran.

After years of war and lack of economic development, many countries in Southwest Asia are completely destroyed. What is urgently needed is the extension of the OBOR/New Silk Road policy for the entire region, as well as the Mediterranean countries – a Marshall plan, but without the Cold War connotations.

Do you see a potential for that, and if so, what are your ideas about it?

H.E. Mr. Morteza Moradian: In the name of God, the compassionate and merciful, I would also like to thank you for arranging this session for me to be able to air my views on the issues of the region, and others. Both Iran and China have high ambitions regarding transportation issues. I think that there is extreme potential for economic development, arising from the idea raised by the Chinese president. Iran is situated at a very important juncture from a transportation point of view. This has nothing to do with the issues of today or yesterday, but it is an historical issue. Iran, and the region around it, are located along a very, very important corridor.

If we look at the important corridors in the world, there are three important ones. We can see that the North-South

corridor, and the East-West corridors, all pass through Iran. The important thing is that transportation corridors necessarily need lead to the growth of economic development, and also, when economic development takes place, what follows that is peace and stability. Our country, and all of the countries of western Asia, are trying to find and develop these transportation routes. In this regard, the idea raised by China can have important consequences for the region. Just to sum it up, this idea of reviving the old Silk Road, would have a very positive influence on development.

As far as Iran is concerned, Iran enjoys a very good position in regard to all forms of transportation – air, sea and land. Iran has always followed up on the issue of reviving the old Silk Road, with China. We now see that the Chinese idea, and the Iranian idea, are now meeting at some point. I think that within the framework of two very important agreements, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and, also, the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), we can have very, very good cooperation. I will give more explanations later about the importance of the SCO and ECO cooperation. These are both in our region, and they can have cooperation with each other.

EIR: You have personally been involved in your country's relations with, especially, Russia and China – two countries which are playing leading roles in today's world, with Russia taking leadership in the fight against Daesh/Islamic State, and China pursuing an inclusive, multi-national, economic development strategy, which is an alternative to the transatlantic monetarist policy leading to economic collapse. Now, starting a new chapter after the sanctions against Iran have been lifted, how do you foresee the future of Iranian relations with Russia, and China, and what benefits will that bring to Iran and the rest of the world?

Ambassador Moradian: As you pointed out, I think the conditions are now conducive for good cooperation and

development. During the years of the sanctions, we had extensive relations with China. There is now about \$50 billion of trade between Iran and China. This has fluctuated some years, but it is between 50-52 billion dollars. China is the biggest importer of Iranian oil. We also had extensive relations with Russia during the years of the sanctions. It's natural, now that the sanctions have been removed, that the relationship between these three nations would develop further.

The important point that I would like to point out is that the three countries have common interests, and common threats facing them. We are neighbors with the Russians. We have common interests with Russia regarding the Caspian Sea, transportation, energy, the environment, and peace in the world. So, we have quite a number of areas where our interests coincide. Other there areas where we have common interests are drug trafficking, and other forms of smuggling, combating extremism and terrorism, and, also, our views on major international issues converge.

We also have quite a number of common interests with China. They include energy, in the consumption market, reviving the Silk Road, combating terrorism, the transportation corridors, and, also, in the framework of the SCO -- quite a number of areas where we have common interests. China needs 9 million barrels of oil on a daily basis. As I said, our trade relations amount to about \$52 billion.

Iran enjoys some very important factors. First of all, it has enormous amounts of energy resources. Its coastline along the Persian Gulf runs up to 3000 kilometers. We are neighbors with 15 countries in the region. So these are very, very important points for Iran to be in the hub. I think that cooperation between these three powers, namely Russia, China, and Iran, can ultimately lead to stability and peace in the region. So the four areas -- the combination of economics, trade, energy and transit -- these are areas that can lead to the ideas that I mentioned. I think that effective cooperation between these three powers can lead to peace and stability, important in

western Asia, and in the Middle East.

The revival of the old Silk Road, at this juncture of time, would be very meaningful. During the recent visit to Iran by the Chinese president, the two sides agreed to increase the volume of trade between the two countries, in the next 10 years, to \$600 billion.

Also, in the recent visit to Iran by President Putin, there was also agreement on Russian investment in Iran. It has to be said that our trade relations, economic relations, with Russia is not as much as it should be. But among the topics discussed when President Putin visited Iran, was to make sure that the volume of economic cooperation increases between Iran and Russia.

Just to sum up our relations with Russia and China regarding economic cooperation, we think that with Russia, it is not enough, and we want to increase that. With China, it has been very good, but we still want to develop that further. Overall the situation is promising.

You are well aware that from the point of view of stability, Iran is unique in the region, and that actually prepares the ground for this cooperation to continue.

EIR: There is already progress on extending the New Silk Road from China to Iran. On February 15, 2016, the first freight train from Yiwu, China, arrived in Teheran. The 14-day-trip covered over 10,000 km. (about 6,500 miles), travelling through Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, saving 30 days compared to the former route. What are the plans to extend this line, and how will that improve economic relations along the New Silk Road? And what new agreements were just made between Iran and China to develop the New Silk Road?

Ambassador Moradian: President Rouhani has very clear views on the Silk Road. In fact, President Rouhani is a specialist in transportation routes and communication. He believes that the basis for development lies in the development of transportation infrastructure. He and the Chinese president have talked over the revival of the Silk Road on a number of

occasions.

There was a discussion that deviated from the main subject of the Silk Road, being propagated during the past few years. That was the idea of the new Silk Road, or the American Silk Road, so to speak, and it was not based on an historical issue. Basically, they wanted to bypass Iran, and deviate the route to bypass Iran, in effect. No one can fight against economic and geographical realities on the ground. When the route through Iran is the shortest route, and the cost effective route, then nobody can go against that. And because the Chinese ideas were more realistic, then Iran and China were able to come to some sort of understanding on the development and revival of the Silk Road.

There is also emphasis on the development of sea routes. We witnessed good investment by the Chinese in this regard, in the recent years. China has invested heavily in Pakistan, in the Gwarder port.

If I want to just come to the issue regarding Iran, then I can go through the following issues. The railroad between Khaf in Iran, and Herat and Mazar-i-Sharif in Afghanistan, is an important connection. The Khaf-Herat section has been completed, but the Herat-Mazar-i-Sharif section is still to be constructed. I think this is an important route that we believe, in my opinion, China would be advised to invest in. Also, within the framework of Danish development aid to Afghanistan, I think a portion of funds to the Herat-Mazar-i-Sharif railroad link would be an important factor.

If this route between Herat and Mazar-i-Sharif were to be completed, then from there, there are two routes – one leading to Uzbekistan, and the other leading to Tajikistan, and that can be an important connection. At the moment, China is making good investments in both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, in order to establish the links. In fact, the link between China, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Iran, is one of the most important links of the Silk Road. And there is a missing link between Herat and Mazar-i-Sharif, as I said, and I hope that the countries concerned, especially China, can help

establish that link. Over the past two years, the corridor between Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Iran has now borne fruit, and is now connected. In fact, the train that you mentioned, that arrived in Teheran, actually came through this route, and this corridor has extreme potential. I hear that quite a number of countries in the region are interested in joining this corridor. We have another corridor linking Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran and Oman, which is called the fourth corridor. And this has also come into operation over the past year-and-a-half.

We also have other corridors, which I call subsidiary corridors. All of these subsidiary corridors can actually enhance and complement the main East-West Silk Road. One very important corridor, that you are aware of, is the North-South corridor, and a section along this corridor is now under construction – the connection between the city of Rasht, and Astara on the Caspian coast. In fact, we have reached agreement with Azerbaijan on the connection between the two cities of Astara in Iran, and Astara in Azerbaijan. This corridor also needs some investment, and we hope that countries like China can help us in developing this. Just to sum up regarding the corridors, there are two routes which need investment: Herat to Mazar-i-Sharif; and Rasht to the Asteras in Iran and Azerbaijan.

Regarding the third part of your question, about the agreements reached by Iran and China during the Chinese president's visit in Iran, 17 agreements were signed during the visit. The areas included energy, financial investment, communication, science, the environment, and know-how. Specifically, on the core of your question about the Silk Road, the two countries agreed to play a leading, and a key role, in the development and operation of this link. They agreed to have cooperation on infrastructure, both railroad and road. For example, electrification of the railroad link between Teheran and Mashhad, is part of this connection of the Silk Road that was agreed to. The other important thing is cooperation on the port of Chabahar in Iran. The two sides

agreed to have cooperation in this, and the Chinese agreed to invest in Chabahar. Regarding industry and other production areas, they agreed that the Chinese would cooperate and invest in 20 areas. Regarding tourism and cultural cooperation, the two sides also agreed to develop cooperation in this regard, within the framework of the Silk Road. I think you can see that within the framework of the Silk Road, there are quite important agreements between the two countries.

EIR: Building great infrastructure projects is a driver for economic growth, and increasing cooperation among nations. Now, after suffering under the sanctions, Iran has an opportunity to build up its infrastructure, as is going on, in cooperation with other countries, to help create the basis for Iran to play an important, stabilizing role in the region.

The P5+1 agreement also cleared the way for Iran's peaceful nuclear energy program, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was just signed with China, to develop peaceful nuclear energy. What were the highlights of the agreement, and what are the plans for Russian-Iranian civilian nuclear cooperation?

Ambassador Moradian: Between Iran, Russia, and China, there has been good cooperation through the years regarding the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

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Because of the reneging of the Western governments, the construction of the Bushehr nuclear power plant was left unfinished, and after the Russians agreed to pick up the pieces, we reached an agreement, and were able to develop, and make this very important plant operational. The cooperation between Iran and Russia on peaceful nuclear energy has been very constructive. All of Iran's atomic activities have been under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). As we have had no deviation from our peaceful nuclear program, after 10 or 12 years, the Western countries, the P5 + 1, finally came to the conclusion that Iran's nuclear program has always been peaceful. I believe that they knew

this at the beginning, as well. This was just a political game. We have also had some kind of constructive cooperation with China over the past two decades on peaceful nuclear energy. During the recent visit to Iran by the Chinese president, an agreement was also signed in this regard. In the implementation of the cooperation agreement, China, Iran and America are also the three countries forming the committee for the implementation of the agreement. It was agreed during the recent visit that China will reconfigure the Arak heavy water plant. The Chinese and the Iranians have also agreed to have cooperation on the building of small-scale nuclear power plants. This, I think, is very important for Iran, in terms of producing electricity, and the Chinese welcome this. We have also signed a number of agreements with China on the construction of a number of nuclear power plants in the past. Iran, because of its extensiveness, has always welcomed cooperation on the development of peaceful nuclear energy for the production of electricity, and other things. In fact, based on the cooperation agreement between Iran and the P5+ 1, there will be agreements with a number of the members of the P5+1 regarding the nuclear issue.

EIR: You already mentioned the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), linking India, Iran, and Russia with Central Asia and Europe. Is there anything more you would like to say about this project, and the benefits that are envisioned?

Ambassador Moradian: I explained about the corridors in my previous answers, but the North-South corridor is one of the most important corridors in the world. If this corridor were completed, it would be very effective in three most important areas – it would be a contributing factor in security, speed, and cost. This corridor starts in Finland, comes through Iran, then on to the Persian Gulf, from there to India, and then towards Africa. If we look at the present route now, it takes 45 days, but if we use the North-South corridor that I just

mentioned, this would reduce the time to 20 days. The route will be 3,000 kilometers shorter. This can be a very important factor from a world economic point of view.

We are faced with realities, with situations, that nobody can ignore. For this reason, during the past few years, Iran has made endeavors, extensive efforts, to actually complete what I call the subsidiary corridors. Right now, in Iran, we have 10,000 kilometers of operational railroad lines. For our present government, the further development of railroad links is very important. We have plans to build another 10,000 kilometers in the future. It is my view, that in the next couple of years, we will see a revolution in transportation.

There are some missing links, which we think should be completed as soon as possible. As I said, from our point of view, the section between Rasht and Astara is very important, and it has to be completed very soon. In fact, during the recent visit of the Danish foreign minister to Teheran, this issue was also brought up. The Iranians announced that if the Danes are prepared to do so, they would be welcome to invest in this section. And we have that link to the Chabahar port. If this port is developed to utilize its full capacity, then this will serve as an important link in the North-South corridor. In the Persian Gulf we also have an island called Qeshm, which has an extreme potential. In fact, because Qeshm, itself, also has gas, and has a strategic location in the Persian Gulf, it can play an important role in the North-South corridor. We are seeing that various countries, like China, Japan, and South Korea, are interested in entering into these areas. In fact, there was a seminar on shipping in Copenhagen, a couple of weeks ago, and I said that to the Danish participants there, that this condition is conducive to involvement for mutual benefit. The benefits to be accrued from the North-South dialogue are global. Iran is making all efforts to complete this corridor.

A lot can be said about the North-South, and East-West corridors. Just to point out, very briefly, on the East-West

corridor, some very important developments have taken place. We have had good negotiations with the Turkish side. One of the most important links in the East-West corridor, is the link between the cities of Sarakhs and Sero. Sero is located on the border with Turkey, and the Turks and the Iranians are now in very extensive negotiations to develop this route. The other route is the railway link between Iran and Iraq, and this is also being constructed on an extensive level. As I said, the subsidiary corridors – the one from Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan to Iran; and the one from Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran and Oman – are now operational, and we are also planning on development, and making other subsidiary routes operational.

EIR: What about cooperation on water desalination, and nuclear fuel?

Ambassador Moradian: Iran is faced with a shortage of water. We have quite a number of projects for water desalination in the Persian Gulf. In fact, one of the main reasons that we wanted nuclear power plants in the Persian Gulf, was to use that energy to desalinate water. Currently, a number of Iranian companies are engaged in this. One of the very big projects came on stream during the past couple of years. Regarding the desalination plants, there is good cooperation between Iran and foreign countries. I think that this is another area where Danish companies can enter into the competition. President Rouhani made a trip to the city of Yazd, in the center of Iran, and he said there, that transfer of water from the Persian Gulf to the center of Iran, to the city of Yazd, is one of the important projects that the government has in mind.

Regarding nuclear fuel, within the framework of the P5+1 agreement with Iran, it envisages extensive cooperation between Iran and these countries on nuclear fuel. Iran is now one of the countries that have the legal right to enrich uranium, and this has been recognized. So, based on the capacities that Iran has, we can exchange nuclear fuel. Within

this framework, we have exchanged quite a lot of fuel with the Russians, and we have cooperation plans with China on the heavy-water plant in Arak.

EIR: Can you speak about cooperation on fighting terrorism and drug trafficking?

Ambassador Moradian: On the issues of combating extremism and terrorism, and trafficking with drugs, and otherwise, there is extensive groundwork for cooperation. The development of extremism, and the instability that follows, is extensive in the CIS countries, and part of China. Iran has extensive experience and knowledge about combating terrorism, and in this regard, Iran can cooperate with those countries regarding this menace. Afghanistan is the world's biggest producer of narcotic drugs. In fact, unfortunately, after Afghanistan was occupied by the ICF coalition, led by America, the level of production of narcotic drugs in Afghanistan has increased extremely violently.

EIR: While the British and the Danish troops were in the Helmand province, I think the production went up about 20 times.

Ambassador Moradian: Exactly. In that region, Helmand, in particular, there was an incredible increase in the amount of production. In fact, in combatting smuggling drugs to come to Iran, to this side, Iran has been a sturdy wall, and we have unfortunately lost quite a number of our security forces in that region, bordering on 4,000. Just something on the sideline which is very important. In fact, Iran is on the frontline in combatting drugs. When Europe talks about helping other countries stem the tide of immigrants to Europe, I think that stemming the tide of narcotic drugs coming to Europe, also requires the same sort of agreements. Iran is very active in combating and preventing drugs coming this way, and the death penalty, the capital punishment we have for the warlords of the drug traffickers, is, actually, in the pursuit of this policy of trying to prevent drugs from reaching outside of the

region. Just imagine if Iran would stop cooperating, stop combatting these drug traffickers? The road would be an open highway, and just imagine how much drugs would then come across. There already exists very good cooperation between Iran, China, and Russia on combating drug trafficking. We have had multi-lateral sessions in the field of combating drug trafficking. I think that within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Iran can play a leading role in combating drug trafficking, extremism and terrorism. In the recent session of the SCO, it was agreed that after the sanctions were lifted against Iran, that Iran's status would be lifted from an observer to a full member. In the next session, which is planned in Uzbekistan, I think that this issue will be raised.

EIR: I think we have covered a lot of very many essential things. Is there anything else that you would like to say to our readers?

Ambassador Moradian: I would like to refer to a few points in this interview, which is about the cooperation between Iran, China, and Russia. The cooperation between Iran, Russia, and China is very important. The more this cooperation increases, the more it can help peace and security in the region. The revival of the old Silk Road is a very important issue. Within the framework of the revival of the Silk Road, the strengthening of the SCO cooperation, and the ECO cooperation is very important. In fact, the cooperation between ECO and SCO is also very important, and has to be developed.

Other very important issues that I would just like to briefly mention are – the first thing is that Iran's full membership in the SCO is important. In fact, in the area of security, SCO needs Iran's experience and influence in this regard. The next thing is that cooperation within the framework of the SCO, can enhance security and peace in the region.

The next thing, is that China must make more investment in Iran. In order to actually develop the Silk Road, it has to

invest more in Iran. China must also make more investments in the port city of Chabahar, and also in the Iranian island of Qeshm.

The other point I would like to mention, is that the Eastern SWIFT (financial transaction network) is also an important idea. I think that the important countries in the East, like China and Russia, should have an alternative financial connection. And the other thing is, the monetary exchange between these two countries is important. What I mean by this, is that these countries can conduct their transactions in the local currencies of the Iranian Rial, the Chinese Yuan, and the Russian Ruble.

The other thing I would like to point out, is that China is the number one country in the world that needs energy, and Iran is one of the leading producers of such energy. But the important point to be born in mind here, is Iran's independence in its decision making regarding its energy resources – oil and gas. In fact, if you look at its record, Iran has never played games with its energy policy. Any country that wants to have economic cooperation with Iran, must take this aspect into consideration, and it is an important consideration. Other countries in our region do not operate in this way.

Finally, I am very pleased that this opportunity arose for me to air my views on economic development in the region, and very important issues that will have global consequences. Thank you.

EIR: Thank you, Mr. Ambassador.

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