



AIDA AMER/AXIOS

Trust-building key to Iran-Europe relations

Exploring structural, behavioral obstacles to dialogue

By Kamran Yeganegi
Foreign policy expert

**OPINION
EXCLUSIVE**

Amid the shifting tides of the international order, and as West Asia transforms into a dynamic arena of renewed geopolitical competition, whispers of revived negotiations between Iran and the European Troika — France, Germany, and the United Kingdom — have begun to surface once more. However, the atmosphere surrounding these diplomatic overtures is not one of enthusiasm, but rather of caution, skepticism, and strategic recalibration. Dialogue for the American side, it seems, is no longer merely a vehicle for mutual understanding, but increasingly a battleground for redefining power and posture.

The current climate is not the result of a singular rupture, but rather the consequence of a gradual erosion of trust shaped by missed opportunities, broken promises, and unreciprocated goodwill. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) once stood as a symbol of constructive engagement — a rare in-

stance in which diplomacy triumphed over confrontation. Yet, the unilateral withdrawal of the United States and the subsequent failure of Europe to uphold its own commitments have left the foundations of that agreement fractured and the capital of trust significantly depleted.

At the structural level, Europe's long-standing challenge in demonstrating strategic autonomy from the United States has been starkly evident. Despite occasional rhetorical divergence, the European Troika's actions have remained closely aligned with Washington's maximalist approach, particularly regarding sanctions and conditionality.

For Tehran, it is deeds, not declarations, that carry weight. And to date, European behavior has yet to reflect a meaningful commitment to redressing the damage caused by the breakdown of prior agreements.

On the behavioral front, a persistent underestimation of the complexity and nuance of Iran's domestic and regional landscape continues to impede progress. Overly abstract analyses, a tendency to rely on outdated

narratives, and an insistence on narrowly defined frameworks have collectively eroded Europe's credibility as an impartial interlocutor. Rather than leveraging its diplomatic heritage to build bridges, Europe has at times resorted to reactive policies shaped more by internal political considerations than by a genuine interest in resolution.

Iran, meanwhile, has responded to this shifting landscape with strategic pragmatism — diversifying its foreign policy, deepening ties with Eastern powers, and reinforcing regional partnerships. The message to Europe is clear: the era of Western exclusivity in Iran's foreign relations is over. Iran remains open to dialogue, but not from a position of weakness, nor within frameworks that reduce diplomacy to an instrument of pressure.

If Europe is sincere in its desire to reclaim relevance in the Iranian equation, it must confront a pivotal challenge: the reconstruction of trust. This cannot be achieved through symbolic gestures alone but requires concrete actions, a genuine acknowledgment of mutual interests, and a departure

from the deceitfulness of the past.

At this sensitive juncture, the future of diplomacy between Iran and Europe depends on a return to fundamental diplomatic principles — honesty, mutual respect, balance, and rationality. In a world increasingly disillusioned with unilateralism, effective diplomacy is defined by its

capacity to accommodate diversity, recognize legitimate interests, and prioritize understanding over escalation.

Europe must now decide: remain a peripheral observer offering polite political gestures, or re-engage as a serious actor — fortified by courage, sincerity, and a renewed diplomatic vision.

“

For Tehran, it is deeds, not declarations, that carry weight. And to date, European behavior has yet to reflect a meaningful commitment to redressing the damage caused by the breakdown of prior agreements.

