

Iran wants better relations with We



Lara Marlowe

Normalisation and sanctions relief hang on nuclear negotiations

Ten months after President Hassan Rouhani took office, Iran is emerging from the isolation that followed the repression of the 2009 “green movement”. During the same period, the US, UN and EU imposed the most crippling sanctions ever against the Islamic Republic.

Over tea, biscuits and pistachios at the Iranian embassy in Blackrock, Ambassador Javad Kachoueian rejoices in Mr Rouhani’s election, which he calls “the wise choice of hope, rationality and moderation by the great people of Iran”.

A specialist in European-Iranian relations, Mr Kachoueian is a senior diplomat with 29 years of experience. Before his arrival in Dublin this spring, he served in embassies in Helsinki, Oslo, The Hague, Copenhagen and London.

Normalise relations

“One of the main goals of the new (Iranian) government is to remove obstacles and normalise relations with Europe, based on mutual respect and common interest,” he says.

Relief from what Mr Kachoueian calls the “illegal, inhuman sanctions” depends on the conclusion of Iran’s negotiations with the US, Russia, China, Germany, France and Brit-

ain regarding Iran’s nuclear programme. A July 20th deadline has been set, but it may be extended.

A preliminary agreement last November precipitated a gold rush of western businessmen, prospecting for deals in Tehran. Although many circumvent the sanctions regime by dealing through third countries, trade remains difficult. The Iranian banking system has been crippled and it is impossible to insure vessels carrying cargo to or from Iran.

“It’s not about nuclear weapons,” Mr Kachoueian insists. “The people of my country cannot accept that others tell them not to have a peaceful nuclear programme.” As a signatory to the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty, the ambassador says Iran has “an inalienable right” to enrich uranium.

The amount of uranium the country is allowed to enrich is the biggest sticking point in negotiations. According to the

New York Times, Israel says Iran must not have more than 5,000 centrifuges, while Tehran says it needs some 50,000 to provide fuel for its nuclear power programme.

Mr Kachoueian points out that the nuclear programme was “conceived and initiated by the Shah and his government, with direct assistance and encouragement by the US and some European countries”. The US and Europe “have been given every opportunity to participate in the development and construction of nuclear reactors in Iran, but they have always refused to do so”, he adds.

Khamenei fatwa

The words “peaceful purposes” occur in nearly every sentence Mr Kachoueian utters regarding the programme. He cites a 2005 fatwa by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of Iran, which forbids “the production, stockpiling and use of weapons of mass destruc-

