

## Iran's Relations with Scandinavian Countries<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Iran, after Hasan Ruhani's victory in election in 2013, has started to establish good relations with Western countries and neighbors. Within this framework, efforts were made to develop relations with Scandinavian countries, and Hasan Ruhani invited these countries' heads of states to Iran. After the nuclear agreement between Iran and P5+1 countries in 2015, Iran-Scandinavia relations have also begun to revive. In the foreign policy of Ruhani, it is important to bring the relations with the Scandinavian countries before the Islamic Revolution and to make trade agreements with these countries for the abolition of heavy sanctions imposed on Iran. The aim of this study is to analyze Iran's relations with the Scandinavian countries in the historical framework and to analyze the developments experienced after the Iranian Islamic Revolution and their reflection on the bilateral relations.

**Keywords:** Iran, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland.

## İran'ın İskandinavya Ülkeleri ile İlişkileri

**Öz:** İran, 2013 yılında Hasan Ruhani'nin seçim zaferiyle birlikte Batılı ülkeler ve komşuları ile iyi ilişkiler kurmak için bir açılım gerçekleştirdi. Bu açılım çerçevesinde İskandinavya ülkeleriyle ilişkiler geliştirilmeye çalışıldı ve söz konusu ülkelerin devlet başkanları Hasan Ruhani tarafından İran'a davet edildi. 2015'te İran ve P5+1 ülkeleri arasında imzalanan nükleer anlaşma ile İran-İskandinavya ilişkileri de canlanmaya başlamıştır. Ruhani'nin dış politikasında, İskandinav ülkeleri ile ilişkileri İslam Devrimi öncesine getirmek ve İran'a uygulanan ağır yaptırımların kaldırılması için bu ülkelerle ticari antlaşmalar yapmak önemli bir yer tutmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı tarihsel çerçeveden İran'ın İskandinavya ülkeleriyle ilişkilerini değerlendirerek, İran İslam Devrimi sonrasında yaşanan gelişmeler ve bu gelişmelerin ikili ilişkilere yansımalarını tahlil etmektir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İran, İsveç, Norveç, Danimarka, Finlandiya.

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## INTRODUCTION

Iran; is one of the major regional powers of the Middle East in terms of geostrategic location, population, energy resources and influence on the Shiite region. Iran and Scandinavian countries<sup>2</sup> have developed bilateral relations in economic issues despite the different forms of governance and foreign policy tendencies in the historical process.

Scandinavian countries; would like to develop good relations with Iran despite their political, cultural, economic and military differences and even their opposite policies. Since its importance in the Middle East geography, its advantageous position for investments due to the population it owns, and its energy resources have made Iran a center of attraction for Western states. Iran wants to improve relations with Scandinavian countries to get rid of sanctions, improve the banking sector and transfer technology. Moreover, Iran aims to enter into more active commercial relations with Scandinavian countries as it was before the Islamic Revolution.

Scandinavian countries and Iran are states that can act on a common ground in economic relations, even though they have different priorities that follow very different policies in the realistic framework. Iran's relations with Scandinavian countries date back to the 17th century.

### 1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE RELATIONS

Iran's relations with Scandinavian countries have started with Denmark since the 17th century and had developed its relations with other countries over time. In 1687, the Danish East Asian Company (Det Istasiatisk Kompagni) seized an Iranian ship and took it to Trankebar Harbor, a colony of its own on the southeast coast of India. Four years after the Danish had sent the cargo ship to Copenhagen, an Iranian ambassador went to Denmark for compensation of the goods. On December 11, 1691, he submitted his credentials to King Christian V. (1670-99) and the Safavid Shah Suleiman's (1666-94) letter for Christian III (1534-59) about a comprehensive inventory of the names of controversial goods and Armenian merchants. Although the Ambassador cannot compensate the goods, his submission of the credentials and the letter to the Danish authorities, thus established Iran-Denmark relations (Iranica, 2017a). However, the geographical distance, the limitations of trade between countries, the internal problems of both countries, the wars in Europe and the East prevented the development of Iranian-Denmark

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<sup>2</sup> Scandinavian countries are considered to be Sweden, Norway and Denmark. The Nordic countries are Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland and Finland. Sweden, Norway and Denmark were included in the study, but Finnish-Iran relations were also included because Finland was in a significant relationship with Iran.

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relations.

From the end of the 19th century, The Danish Ambassador of St. Petersburg had also been accredited in Iran and other countries in the region. Until 1933, when Denmark established the first consulate in Tehran, there was no significant diplomatic relationship between the two countries. The Danish Embassy has been operating in Tehran since 1934, while the Iranian Consulate in Copenhagen has been promoted to the embassy in 1958 with the visit of Shah Mohammad Riza (1941-79). King of Denmark Frederick IX. visited Iran in 1962 on an official visit (Vahman, 2017). During the Shah period, Iranian-Danish relations were not intensive in political, military and diplomatic terms, but commercial relations were generally developed. The Scandinavian countries followed a cautious policy towards Iran, like other European countries, after the Islamic Revolution.

Denmark has developed economic relations with Iran, as well as before the revolution, and this has reflected as an increase in diplomatic and political ties. Since the Islamic Revolution, Denmark has maintained a good relationship with Iran in general but has been cautious about human rights. Danish diplomats condemn Iran's human rights violations when decisions are made against Iran on human rights. However, the Danish government, like the example of Salman Rüşti, did not publish condemnation against Iran, despite the intense criticism of the national press.<sup>3</sup> The tendency of the Liberal and Conservative governments of Denmark to develop relations with the US and Israel, especially in the period covering the years 2001 to 2009, has in particular overshadowed the country's relations with Iran (Embassy of Iran in Copenhagen, 2017; Iranica, 2017b). However, the failure of Denmark to participate in the condemnation and its negative attitude to Iran's sanctions prevented Iran-Denmark relations from being completely broken.

Sweden, which is an important power in the Scandinavian geography and locomotive of the region, had developed its relations with Iran in the 19th century. In 1896, Iran issued an embassy in Russia and as an accreditation to Sweden, thus taking an important step in terms of Iran-Sweden diplomatic relations. Then, in 1920, with the official opening of the Embassy of Iran in Stockholm, the diplomatic relations between the two countries reached the highest level. Prior to World War I, Swedish officers took an active role in the establishment and development of the Iranian gendarmerie contributing to the development of Iranian-Swedish relations. The

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<sup>3</sup> Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the Iranian Islamic Revolution, gave death fatwa in 1989 due to Salman Rushdie's book "Satanic Verses". Iranian officials have announced that Khomeini will pay a cash prize to fulfill the death penalty for Rushdie.

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fact that Swedish experts are active in the region has made Sweden open to the Middle East (Küçük, 2017). Iran and Sweden's mutual abolishment of visa applications in 1968 had improved political relations as well as economic co-operation between the two countries. Sweden has become one of the first countries to recognize the Islamic Republic of Iran (Embassy of Iran in Stockholm, 2017). Despite the US sanctions against Iran in 1979 and the UN Security Council sanctions in 2006, the Iranian-Swedish economic relations were maintained as in other Scandinavian countries. The absence of medicines and food products in the sanctions provided the continuity of the relations.

Finland, an industrial power in the Scandinavian geography, gained its independence in 1917. Iran recognized Finnish Republic in 1918, and in 1934 the Finnish Government appointed the Ambassador of Angora Aarno Yrjö-Koskinen, as an accredited to Tehran. In 1970, Shah Mohammad Riza became the first Iranian president to visit Finland. The President of Finland, Urho Kekkonen, was also in Tehran in 1971 to attend the 2500th anniversary of the Persian Empire. In 1974, the Consulate General of Finland in Tehran was improved to the embassy level and Kurt Uggeldahl was appointed as the first permanent ambassador. Relations interrupted with the Islamic Revolution were reestablished in 1984 when Iran activated the embassy in Helsinki (Embassy of Finland in Tehran, 2017).

In the Scandinavian countries, although monarchy is the issue, democratic values are being considered as a top priority. The concepts of human rights, law and freedom are indispensable for these countries. The Scandinavian countries were governed by coalition governments, in which almost every political idea was represented. Along with the Iranian Islamic Revolution, Iran-Scandinavia relations stayed in the shade of issues of human rights, law, freedom due to the sensitivity of the political parties in the Scandinavian governments.

Scandinavian countries have preferred to remain neutral rather than being in a party to the developments in the Middle East and agreed that peaceful means should be used for solution. Scandinavian diplomats, who have been active in international organizations, played an active role in negotiations and diplomacy in the Middle East problems.

## **2. INDISPENSABILITY OF THE RELATIONS: ECONOMY**

The fact that Scandinavian countries have free market economies and that they are in the first place in the global freedom standards have given the countries an important respect. Scandinavian countries that are developing in industry and technology are also important for Iran. Since Scandinavian countries do not follow hegemonic policies, Iran gives priority to these

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countries among foreign investors.

The liberal policies followed in the period of Shah Mohammad Riza developed economic relations between Sweden and Iran, and opened the door for new investments. For example, the Swedish industrial company AB Motala Verkstad built a metal bridge in Ahvaz I in August 1936. SKF Bearing Co.Global signed a contract in 1964 and established a bed factory in Iran (Embassy of Iran in Stockholm, 2017). Sweden has continued to be effective in the Iranian market even after the Islamic Revolution. In 1983, Sweden exported \$ 256 million to Iran while imports were \$ 128 million. In the 1980s, Iran became Sweden's second largest export country in the Middle East. Swedish firms have also been instrumental in opening iron mines from Kirman (MERI, 1985). Having energy resources, having an important population and being in a strategic position in the region has Iran enabled to become a center of attraction in terms of Scandinavian countries. Swedish-Iranian economic relations have been severely affected by UN and EU sanctions. Before sanctions, one of Sweden's greatest partners in the Middle East was Iran. So for the Swedish companies, Iran has an important market potential. According to the agreement signed in 2003, if Iran became a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), Sweden would increase its industrial, mining and telecommunication projects in Iran (IRNA, 2003). But when the UN Security Council and the European Union imposed new sanctions, the Swedish-Iran bilateral trade showed a regression. For example, Sweden's exports to Iran in 2005 were \$ 913 million, compared with \$ 416 million a year after sanctions were imposed. By 2014, exports to Iran were down to \$ 242 million, and half of this amount was from the telecommunications sector which were exempted from sanctions (The Local, 2015).

Scandinavian countries are directly influenced by the decisions of international organizations, although they want to improve relations with Iran. For example, the FATF (Financial Action Task Force) announced the restrictions imposed on Iran have been extended for one more year until the current deficiencies are resolved despite the banking and finance reforms in Iran after the Comprehensive Joint Action Plan (IRNA, 2017a). Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland, despite their membership of the FATF, have also failed to prevent the decision. The troubles in Iran's banking sector have been voiced at the highest level and this has been shared with Scandinavian authorities. Ruhani, during his visit to New York for the the UN General Assembly's meeting on September, 2017, had a meeting with the Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven and confirmed that the Comprehensive Joint Action Plan (COP) provided a good opportunity for the development of relations between the two countries and emphasized that both Iran and Sweden could benefit from this. Ruhani, who emphasized that current agreements

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should be implemented, said that "We need banking relations for the development of economic relations and all relations in other fields will develop" and Lofven also wanted to implement current agreements between the two countries and explained that his country supports the elimination of banking problems in Iran (IRNA, 2017b).

Swedish companies are closely monitoring the Iranian Nuclear Agreement process and think that exports will increase in a serious manner as sanctions against Iran are mitigated or abolished. It is also expected that there will be serious competition among international companies for the Iranian market which will hold significant potential together with the abolishment of sanctions. For example, Swedish company Ericsson, operating in the field of communications in Iran for many years as in Turkey, puts its signature under important investments. As a matter of fact, Sweden's exports to Iran amounted to 2.1 billion SEK (Swedish krona) in 2014, which amounted to SEK 1.5 billion in the telecommunications sector (The Local, 2015). The fact that the telecommunication sector is not covered by sanctions has made Scandinavian companies easier to work and made Iran more suitable for investments.

Denmark is one of the leading countries of Scandinavia, which has developed in the technology and energy sectors. Iran, which is an oil exporting country, has been trying to make a balanced trade with Denmark for many years thanks to its energy resources rather than being technologically improved. But in the mid-1970s, the discovery of oil and gas in the North Sea led Denmark to become a self-sufficient country and to pull oil imports to a very low level. As a reflection of this situation, in the export of Denmark to Iran, industrial goods constitute an important part of trade. According to the 1990 trade statistics, Denmark's agricultural exports amounted to 446 million kron, industrial exports amounted to 419 million kron and other commodities amounted to 17 million kron. Iran's exports to Denmark are predominantly carpets, dried fruits, raw and semi-finished materials (Iranica, 2017c).

Iranian companies face great difficulties in financial transactions as financial sanctions are imposed on Iran. Iran Copenhagen Ambassador Morteza Damanpak Jami stressed that Danish companies are in business with Iran even when Tehran enters international sanctions. For example, a Danish pharmaceutical company has sold drugs to Iran but announced that it will collect the money after sanctions have been abolished (Iran Front Pibid, 2016). The Danish pharmaceutical company Novo Nordisk decided to set up a \$ 80 million factory and sign an agreement with Iran before signing an agreement to lift sanctions. Since 2002, Novo Nordisk has been manufacturing with a local partner company in Iran. However, Novo Nordisk, which will have its own factory with sanctions removed, will be the first Western pharmaceutical

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company to establish a manufacturing facility in Iran (Financial Times, 2015).

According to information provided by Denmark's Ambassador in Tehran Danny Annan, drug exports have an important place in bilateral relations in recent years. According to 2016 data, about 48% of exports from Denmark to Iran were realized in the pharmaceutical sector. According to the data of the same year, 68% increase in exports to Iran in the first 9 months was targeted and it was aimed to reach 270 million euros by the end of the year. According to Ambassador Annan, the "backbone" of Iranian-Danish trade is the pharmaceutical sector (Tehran Times, 2016a). One of the biggest reasons why the pharmaceutical sector has an important place in Denmark's exports to Iran is that the pharmaceutical sector is not included in sanctions. This is an important advantage for Danish pharmaceutical companies.

Danish companies are able to make significant investments in Iran, especially in the mining, cement and dairy sectors. In 2014 and 2015, an agreement between world-famous Danish originated FLSmidth of global mining and Iran was signed in engineering, cement production and technical fields. One of the areas Denmark wants to work with Iran is renewable energy sources (Tehran Times, 2016b). Nevertheless, it remains uncertain how much cooperation Iran will have with Scandinavian countries, which make significant investments in renewable energy sources. Because oil and natural gas are still important for the Iranian economy.

When it comes to removing the sanctions imposed on Iran, Scandinavian companies such as Western companies have also attempted to invest in the country. For example, in 2017, the Danish government decided to expand its business alliance with Iran in sustainable urban development and patent conventions (Tehran Times, 2017).

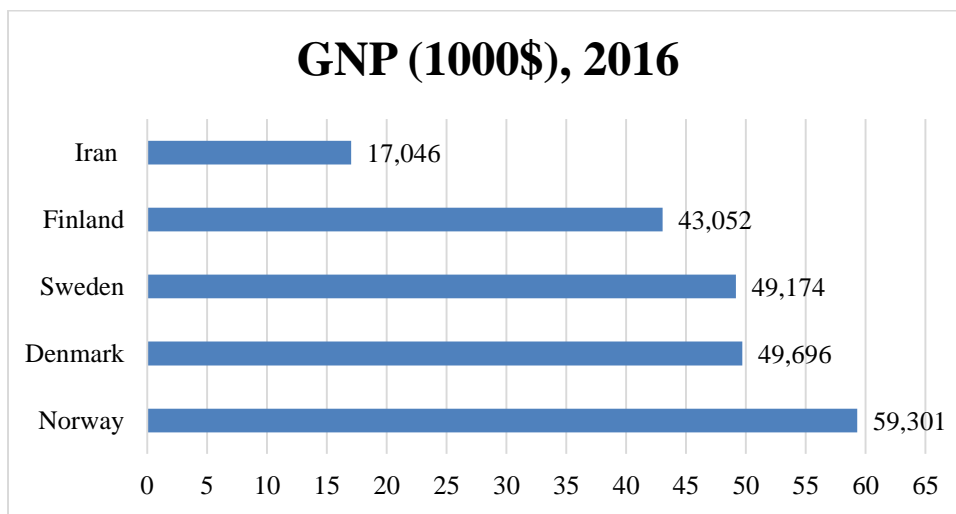
Norway is one of the world's leading countries in the field of renewable energy and wants to increase its trade volume with Iran, like other Scandinavian countries. The Norwegian Ministry of Transport announced in early 2017 on behalf of the Scandinavian countries that it would make an agreement with Iran to make direct flights to Iran (Reuters, 2017). Scandinavian-Iranian relations will gain momentum in every direction if SAS, the partner airline of three Scandinavian countries (Sweden, Denmark and Norway), is flying to Iran. In addition, the full upturn of the embargo will create new opportunities for trade, investment and technology for the Scandinavian countries, which are relatively more advantageous to other Western countries.

Finland is also one of the first countries in the field of technology, as it is one of the world's leading countries in the forest industry. With the mitigation of sanctions, the trade volume between Iran and Finland grew by 96% in 2014 and by 106% in 2015. Finnish companies,

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which have reduced their relations with Iran or brought it to an end with sanctions, have started to take place in the Iranian market again with the sanctions being eased. Finland has also enjoyed Iran's return to the global market (IRNA, 2017c). But Israel, which wants to keep sanctions on Iran and pursues a policy accordingly, is uncomfortable with the development of relations between Scandinavian countries and Iran. For example, when sanctions are not yet on the agenda for mitigating or removing, the Israeli press in 2012 claimed that the Sweden was trying to prevent the enforcement of EU sanctions for fear of losing its gains in Iran (Haaretz Newspaper, 2012).

**Table 1.** Gross National Products of Scandinavian Countries and Iran (World Bank, 2017)



As seen in the table above, there is a gap between the Scandinavian countries and Iran's gross national product ratios. The Scandinavian countries, which have important companies in the field of technology and industry, operate in various regions of the world. But it is hard to say for Iran. This leads to a serious gap in the trade volume between the Scandinavian countries and Iran. The Iranian-Scandinavian economic relations were severely reduced due to sanctions in 1979 and 2006, but imports and exports continued.

### **3. REFLECTION OF HIGH LEVEL VISITS ON ECONOMIC RELATIONS**

When the sanctions imposed on Iran were to be eased or abolished, Scandinavian countries' interest in Iran increased. Top-level visits were paid to Iran to improve trade relations. President Hasan Ruhani personally invited the leaders of Scandinavian countries to realize these visits and to gain momentum in bilateral relations. Iran involved in diplomatic initiatives and expects the agreements, which were signed before and during visits, to be implemented as soon as possible but the Scandinavian countries concerned and are waiting sanctions to be lifted. This situation poses a serious problem for the development of relations.



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### 3.1. Finland's President Sauli Niinistö's Visit To Iran

Finnish-Iranian relations have generally improved at the level of diplomatic and economic relations, but bilateral relations have weakened due to various sanctions imposed on Iran. President Sauli Niinisto visited Iran on 25-26 October 2016 to develop relations and sign new agreements upon the invitation of President Hasan Ruhani. Ruhani said "This visit will move the regional and global business partnership between the two countries further, and we will witness the further development of the relations of the two countries after the signing of agreements. Energy, transport, industry, technology, environment, mining and forestry are important topics for developing relations between the two countries." Niinisto also noted significant steps in tourism, "In the future, travel from Finland to Iran and Iran to Finland will be easier." Within the scope of the visit, agreements were signed on business cooperation on energy, communication, technology, environment and mutual investments. Iran and Finland have also signed a business cooperation protocol in the field of renewable energy development and technology transfer (Pars Today, 2016). These signed agreements and visits at the presidential level contributed to the sustainability of Iran-Finland relations.

President Ruhani stated that the friendship between the two countries continues and that trade relations between Iran and Finland have increased in the last few months, despite the fact that trade relations are suspended due to the embargo, and that bilateral relations will further increase after this visit made by the Finnish President to Tehran. He also emphasized that the visit of the President of Finland is important in this respect, referring to the international banking transactions leading up to the troubles experienced by Iran. Hasan Ruhani stated that he had done various actions in order to make direct flights between Iran and Finland in the future (Mehr News Agency, 2016). He also considered the visit of the President of Finland as a good start for the development of relations (IRNA, 2016).

The Iranian Revolutionary Guide Ayatollah Khamenei stressed that he welcomes the development of a business tie-up with Finland by pointing out the negotiations on the development of relations for the reception of Finnish President Niinisto and his accompanying delegation. Ayatollah Hameni stated that the agreements signed between the two states should be implemented or otherwise leave a negative mark on Iranian public opinion (Pars Today, 2016). Iran wants agreements to be passed on to life as soon as possible without waiting for the sanctions to be completely lifted, in order to keep the institutional order and to keep the damages sanctions given to the country at minimum level.

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Iranian President Hassan Ruhani, who received the trust letter of Keijo Norvanto, the Ambassador of Tehran, the Republic of Finland: *"Today we can say that there is a good environment for investing in Iran. Thus Finnish investors can actively operate in these areas. The two countries should also develop business co-operation in natural, historical and cultural tourism areas"* (Mehr News Agency, 2017).

Iran wants to have long term and strategic relations with Finland as well as with other Scandinavian countries. The countries are planning to make the business relations with Iran permanent because of the significant developments in the fields such as banking, energy, mining, transportation and forestry industry.

### **3.2. Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven's Visit To Iran**

Stefan Löfven became the first Swedish Prime Minister to visit Iran after many years with the invitation of Iranian President Hasan Ruhani on 11-12 February 2017. Talks focused on developments in the Middle East, human rights and trade issues. The fact that Sweden is a member of the UN Security Council has once again increased the importance of these titles. The Swedish delegation emphasized its concerns about Iran's attitude towards human rights, death penalty, freedom of the press, women and minority rights. At the end of the talks, bilateral agreements on higher education, research, transportation, technology, innovation and trade were signed. In addition, Prime Minister Löfven visited Mammüt, a joint venture of Swedish company Scania with Iran (The Government Offices of Sweden, 2017a). The visit of the prime minister and his delegation to Iran led to controversy in Sweden and other countries. An argument started about issue of Swedish Trade Minister Ann Linde, who was there for the negotiations to discuss the economic issues, wearing headscarf. Although Sweden described itself as "the world's first feminist government", the Minister's wearing headscarf on the visit was considered as a contradiction. The Swedish government explained that wearing a headscarf is a requirement of Iranian law. Some Swedish political parties also criticized the government's foreign policy rhetoric, addressing the headscarf issue. For example, Liberal Party leader Jan Björklund said, "This is the end of feminist foreign policy." Björklund further stated that the women in the delegation should not wear a headscarf otherwise; they would have to sign the agreement in Sweden or another country. According to the Swedish government, gender equality is the main objective of Swedish foreign policy (BBC, 2017a). Despite all these controversies, it will be possible to see how much Sweden's feminist foreign policy will have an effect on Iran or how it will achieve success in the world in the coming periods.

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Prime Minister Löfven's also had a meeting with Aytullah Khamenei in Iran, the Revolution Guide. He emphasized that Sweden is a state with a good name in the eyes of the Iranian nation because of its relations with Iran and based on the theories, and that the optimistic view of the two nations will be a suitable ground for developing a business alliance. He also mentioned the existence of an educated young population, one of the important capacities of Iran. Sweden Prime Minister Löfven on this, he said that the young population of Iran has a large capacity. Like the Iranian government, Ayatollah Khamenei also said that he welcomed the development of reciprocal relations with Sweden, but he pointed out that there are anticipations in Iran as well as the anticipation of the other side. He stated that there are many convenient areas (especially populations) to develop relations, but that in the past year and a half, some European countries have not implemented the majority of agreements signed with Iran. "*We expect you to act in such a way that we do not just leave the agreements on paper, which we know you as an expert of action and practice,*" he told Swedish Prime Minister Löfven (Pars Today, 2017b). Thus, the Revolution Guide, Khamenei, demanded the support and business cooperation of Sweden's financial sector.

Iranian President Hasan Ruhani stressed the importance of Sweden for Iran with the words "*Sweden is both a developed European country and a very valuable country for us as a temporary member of the UNGC*", referring to the historical relations of the two countries at a joint press conference with the Prime Minister of Sweden (Ehli Beyt Haber, 2017). Swedish Prime Minister Löfven's visit was positive and many areas were reconciled and relations were crowned with new agreements. In this way, five business union agreements have been signed on higher education and research, technology, transportation, communication, information technology and women's participation in the work force. In addition, during this visit Sweden opened commercial representation in Tehran (The Government Offices of Sweden, 2017b). This has been an important step for institutional execution of economic relations.

As a result, Scandinavian countries are aiming to develop trade relations with Iran, a regional power in the Middle East. Both the Iranian side and the Scandinavian countries have made mutual visits at various levels. This contributes to the development of diplomatic relations as well as economic and political relations. In this context, the Scandinavian countries have signed many agreements with Iran in the fields mentioned above, but because of that these agreements cannot be implemented, relations between the two countries came to a standstill.

#### 4. THE IMPACT OF THE NUCLEAR PROGRAM ON RELATIONS

Nuclearization in Iran began at the time of Shah Muhammad Riza Pahlavi and the first nuclear work was carried out with the support of the United States in 1957. Six nuclear reactors have been established under the leadership of Shah and US and EU countries have been an important supporter of the development of energy activities. But with the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution, all agreements in the nuclear field were canceled by Western countries. The nuclear problem stems from distrust between the West and Iran. The main causes of this can be explained as follows: a) Iran is governed by shari'a laws. b) Iran's bad relations with the US and Israel. c) Engagement of Iran of the proxy wars in the region. d) Iran's support of Shia groups in some countries in (Iraq, Yemen, Bahrain, etc.). e) Iran's development of relations with radical organizations (Keskin, 2008).

The United States has begun implementing new sanctions against Iran in 1999, which has continued to develop its nuclear program. In 2002, the Iranian nuclear crisis came to the surface with the disclosure of information on some secret facilities by the Organization of the People's Mujahideen, which is in opposition to the regime in Iran (İRAM, 2016). The crisis is a matter of concern to Scandinavian countries as well as to other EU countries.

Scandinavian countries, especially Sweden want diplomatic means to be preferred over nuclear crisis with Iran. For example, Carl Bildt, President of the Swedish Parliament's Foreign Policy Commission, said in 2008 that Iran had civil nuclear technology rights. Sweden has always been a fan of dialogue channels and has often voiced that the problem can not be solved with sanctions. The Swedish Kingdom's Ambassador to Tehran Christofer Gyllenstierna claimed that despite the sanctions imposed on Iran in 2007, Iranian-Swedish economic relations would not be affected. When harder sanctions against Iran came to light in 2009, Greece, Spain, Austria and Sweden opposed it. Swedish Foreign Minister Bildt emphasized the need for dialogue on uranium enrichment (Critical Threats, 2010). Scandinavian countries have to resort to sanctions imposed by the US and EU countries, albeit as long as negotiations are kept open and the nuclear issue needs to be resolved through dialogue.

While new sanctions were imposed on Iran in 2012, Scandinavian countries participated in embargoes together with other EU countries. The Chairman of the EU Council of Ministers and Danish Foreign Minister Villy Soevndal have argued that the new sanctions imposed would put Iran in a difficult situation and lead to changes (the regime would have to follow more liberal policies or the regime would be demolished). Soevndal said that "*I firmly believe that sanctions*

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*will be effective and put the Iranian government in a difficult situation.*" Muhammad Ismail Kuvsari, Vice-President of the National Security Committee of the Iranian Parliament, explained that the Strait of Hormuz would be closed if any obstacles to the sale of Iranian oil were encountered. Carl Bildt said, *"I do not believe that Iran will take this step. This is because they are totally away from constructivism. Their exports reach the world through the Strait of Hormuz. This gives them more damage than we do"*(Deutsche Welle, 2012). Bildt, who closely follows developments in the Middle East and is aware of the events, has assessed the situation from a real political point of view. Despite the new sanctions, the diplomacy between the EU and Iran has continued and relations have gained a positive momentum in 2015.

Five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany (P5 + 1) and Iran have signed an agreement on 14 July 2015. Iran, which allows the International Atomic Energy Agency to military-controlled areas, was expecting sanctions on oil, natural gas, finance, aviation and maritime transport to abolish, and to reach the billions of dollars frozen abroad (BBC, 2015). Indeed, EU High Representative for External Relations and Security Policy Federica Mogherini said on January 16, 2016 in Vienna, *"Six months have passed since the signing of the historic agreement today. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has adhered to Iran's joint action plan, confirming that it meets the terms of the deal. Multilateral national, economic and financial sanctions related to the Iran's nuclear program has abolished and as it fulfilled its commitments"* (Euro News, 2016). He said that the sanctions imposed on Iran were brought to an end. However, US President D. Trump, who began in 2017, said he did not intend to pursue the deal with Iran, which led to stiff reactions in Iran. Indeed, on July 18, 2017, the US made new economic sanctions on Iran related for its ballistic missile program and "aid to terrorist organizations" (BBC, 2017b)

Scandinavian countries, unlike US President Trump, aim to develop relations with Iran, like other EU countries. Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallström explained that Europe is committed and united in the implementation of the nuclear deal with the Iranian Foreign Ministry official Majid Tahtrevani. As a matter of fact, Wallström has stated that business relations and customs in different fields between Iran and Sweden are at a good level and that this should be advanced (Pars Today, 2017a). Similarly, other Scandinavian countries also state that sanctions imposed on Iran must be concluded as soon as possible in order to improve trade relations with Iran. Scandinavian countries are advocating the preference for negotiations instead of the one for which sanctions are not desirable.

Scandinavian countries, like other EU countries, are willing to continue their negotiations with

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Iran in the direction of the reports of the International Atomic Energy Agency, unlike US President Trump. Iran, on the other hand, pursue the agreement with the P5 + 1 countries and wishes to take advantage of the economic and strategic opportunities that this agreement brings. This agreement will, in the present case, provide benefits both in terms of Scandinavian countries and in terms of Iran's economic relations.

## **5. VULNERABILITY IN RELATIONS: CARTOON CRISIS**

The Danish newspaper Politiken wrote on 17 September 2005, "Fear of Deep Criticism of Islam", by author Kåre Bluitgen. He noted that he had difficulty finding an illustrator for the book he wrote about Prophet Muhammad. Jyllands-Posten, one of Denmark's best-selling newspapers, published 12 cartoons of the Prophet. On October 12, diplomatic representatives of 11 Muslim countries demanded to meet with Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen, stating that the cartoons included aggression. But Rasmussen denied meeting with the ambassadors and explained that those who are disturbed should resort to the court. After this, some Danish Muslims filed a lawsuit against the newspaper. In addition, some Muslim leaders in Denmark visited the countries of the Middle East and wanted support from religious and political leaders. Prime Minister Rasmussen, once again on January 1, 2006 referred the freedom of Denmark, explaining that the views of publishing insulting cartoons in some newspapers about the Muhammad were transmitted to the UN, "*We have stated that it is not the question of whether we should put pressure on the press as the government. In a society where democracy is dominant, the limit of freedom of expression is very broad.*" On January 25, religious leaders in Saudi Arabia demanded apology and punishment of Jyllands-Posten. Immediately, the Ambassador of Saudi Arabia in Copenhagen was recalled and Danish goods were boycotted. Then protests began to spread in the Middle East. Jyllands-Posten apologized on his website on January 30, but said he had right to print the cartoons under Danish laws. Unsatisfied Danish Muslims demanded the journalist to openly apologize. Meanwhile Magazinet, a Norwegian newspaper, and the media of France, Germany, England, Spain, USA, Iceland, Italy, Belgium, Portugal, Switzerland, Bulgaria and Hungary re-published the cartoons. Rasmussen met with diplomats and representatives of more than 70 countries, but he explained that the Danish government could never offer an apology for a free and independent newspaper in the aftermath. Immediately the following day, on 4 February, the protesters of Damascus attacked the Danish and Norwegian Embassies. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad demanded that the agreements with European countries, which would allow the publication of the cartoons in newspapers, should be reconsidered. While Protestors in Beirut attacked the Danish

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Embassy, protests spread all over the Middle East. Iran recalled the Copenhagen Ambassador, while the Danish and Norwegian Governments, recalled their representatives in Damascus. On February 6, Lebanon apologized from Denmark, while Denmark, Austria Embassies and Norwegian Peace Force in Afghanistan were also attacked in Tehran. On February 7, EU Trade Chief Peter Mandelson warned that Iran should not suspend trade with Denmark. The United States accused Iran and Syria of promoting violence among Muslims by using to cartoons. By the way, people continued to die. On February 11, Denmark recalled its embassy workers in Iran, Syria and Indonesia because of security concerns and threats. On February 13, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan explained that the countries concerned should pay damages since the Iranian and Syrian governments can not protect foreign embassies against the demonstrators. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights accused the Danish government of being irresponsible, as well as the Jyllands-Posten newspaper, which first published the cartoons. While the Danish government insisted on not apologizing, Denmark's Jyllands-Posten newspaper, which first published Muhammad's cartoons, apologized with a full-page text (Financial Times, 2006; Ayın Tarihi, 2006a; Ayın Tarihi, 2006b; Ayın Tarihi, 2006c). The Norwegian Government apologized to Muslim countries for publishing their cartoons in the *Magazinet* magazine (Hürriyet, 2006a). But the reactions from the Muslim countries continued. The Iranian press reacted to the Western media as well as to the Danish and Norwegian press. The *Hamschahri* newspaper in Tehran, which launched a retaliation against the cartoon crisis, announced that the winners of the Jewish Holocaust (Holocaust) cartoon contest will be rewarded with gold. Despite the incoming reactions, the contest was held and 12 people were rewarded (Deutsche Welle, 2006a; Hürriyet, 2006b).

As the crisis continued, Danish Prime Minister Rasmussen stated that the ambassadors in Iran, Syria and Indonesia were being withdrawn, arguing that security measures were not taken sufficiently. However, he explained that this would not mean that the mentioned countries would cut diplomatic relations. In addition, Rasmussen, in support of the words of US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, accused Syria and Iran for provocation (Hürriyet, 2006c). These expressions tightened the Danish-Iranian relations and economic relations were suspended. But with the end of the cartoon crisis, Danish-Iranian relations began to normalize. In 2006, the Iranian Ambassador returned to Copenhagen and the Danish Embassy in Tehran was reopened. Mutual visits in 2007 and 2009 provided the development of Danish-Iranian relations, but some political situations had varied the relations. For example, during the 2009 Iranian presidential election, relations with Denmark got abysmal because of the Danish press, and in the elections

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held in 2013, a positive atmosphere emerged again. In 2014 Iranian-Danish relations were celebrated for the 80th anniversary, and on January 4, 2016, Danish Foreign Minister Kristian Jensen visited Iran with the representatives of Danish companies (Embassy of Iran in Copenhagen, 2017). In the talks, steps were taken for the development of Danish-Iranian relations, taking bilateral relations and regional issues into consideration. Mutual visits continued in 2017 and new agreements were made for cooperation.

In the cartoon crisis, Iran's political, diplomatic and economic relations with Denmark and Norway were damaged. Sweden paid special attention not to be involved in the cartoon crisis, but the intervention of Foreign Minister Laila Freivalds in the press led to serious debate in the country's public opinion. An extreme right-wing website that plans to publish the cartoons of the Prophet wanted to be shut down by the intervention of Swedish Foreign Minister Laila Freivalds. The Foreign Minister resigned on March 21st when she was subjected to intense criticism on the grounds that she was pressuring the closure of this website and lying to the press. The prudent movement of Sweden and Finland from the countries of the region did not adversely affect relations with Iran (Deutsche Welle, 2006b).

Cartoon crisis; an international problem has arisen by following the path of debate, boycott and violence. This has strained relations of Iran with Western nations as it has provoked reactions in Muslim countries. Relevance normalization can only be achieved after a painful process.

#### **6. THE IMPACT OF THE IRANIAN DIASPORA ON RELATIONSHIPS**

Members of any nation or beliefs living outside the original country are called Diasporas (TDK, 2017). Diasporas in the world are born with different or similar reasons. The reason for the emergence of the Iranian diaspora is the increasing regime opposition with the Islamic Revolution.

The Iranians who left their countries were scattered to various parts of the world. The reasons for preferring Scandinavian countries are more sensitive in particular issues such as human rights, freedom of the press, freedom of belief, and so on. In Sweden, one of these countries, 70.000 people of Iranian origin live according to the official statistics of 2016. Iranian-born Swedish citizens are active in politics as well as in many other fields (IRNA, 2017d).

In Sweden there were 1.412 Iranian immigrants in 1976. The majority of them were students or businessmen who came to the country to pursue their higher education. With the outbreak of the Islamic Revolution, the flow of migration from Iran to Sweden gained momentum. However, the number of Iranians who came to Sweden did not exceed 500 per year until 1984.



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But in 1984, migration from Iran to Sweden had a turning point. That year, 1.074 Iranians migrated to Sweden. Since that date, the number of Iranians who came to Sweden has increased exponentially and reached the summit with 6.203 immigrants in 1988. As a result of this influx, in five years (from 1985 to 1990) the number of Iranian citizens in Sweden increased from 7.317 to 32.171. The Iranian diaspora, although viewed from the outside as a homogeneous structure, comes from many different small ethnic groups. However, ideological differences play an active role in cultural formation rather than ethnic structures (Kaladjahi, 1997). The Iranians were concentrated in the big cities of Sweden but did not concentrate in certain neighborhoods when compared to immigrant groups. The Iranians live in cities like Stockholm, Gothenburg, Uppsala, Malmö, Linköping, Lund, Borås and Västrås. Scandinavian countries are pursuing more successful policies on integration than other European countries and are signing significant projects. In Malmö, Sweden's third largest city, for example, 43% of the population have immigrant background (Deutsche Welle, 2015). The fact that the population of Scandinavian countries is low, citizenship of immigrants at certain rates every year has enabled people of Iranian origin to settle in these countries.

In a survey of Iranians living in Sweden, it is observed that the higher the duration of Iranians living in Sweden, the higher the level of education and culture (Kaladjahi, 1997).

**Table 2.** Iranian Diaspora in Scandinavian Countries (Danmarks Statistik, 2017; Statistics Sweden, 2017; Statistics Finland, 2017)

	1990	2000	2010	2016
Iranians in Sweden	40.084	51.101	62.120	70.637
Iranians in Denmark	8.591	12.980	15.209	19.382
Iranians in Norway	5.381	10.354	16.321	20.461
Iranians in Finland	516	2.650	5.164	7.698

The number of Iranians living in Denmark before the Islamic Revolution probably was not over 150. Since the 1980s, thousands of Iranians have benefited from Denmark's liberal refugee policy to leave their country. The Iranians in Denmark were 8.800 people, including students, writers, poets, filmmakers, artists and musicians. According to Danish statistics; The Iranians constitute the largest refugee group in Denmark with a higher education level. Due to the difficulty of learning by Danca and the high standards of the Danish education system, as well as the foreign cultures of Danish culture, "cultural shock" is one of the factors preventing

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assimilation. The activities of Persian broadcasting organizations (NGOs) also prevent the full realization of assimilation (Iranica, 2017c).

The numbers of Iranians, who also have a significant population in Norway and Finland, increased after the Islamic Revolution. As can be seen in the table above, the country with the least Iranian refugees among the countries in subject is Finland, which has the least population.

Practices on human rights and death penalty in Iran can sometimes turn into an anti-Iran action or campaign around the world. For example, the imprisonment of a woman named Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani for imprisonment on the grounds that she was guilty of adultery has caused a great reaction in the Scandinavian countries as well as in the world. The Foreign Ministry issued a joint press statement following the meeting of the Scandinavian Council, informing that that they wanted to stop the execution of Ashtiani and that they are against any kind of death penalty. Iran, on the other hand, has declared that the Westerners are arrogant by turning Ashtiani's case into a human rights case. The death penalty was stopped on the incidents and Ashtiani, who had been detained since 2006, was released in 2014 (Svenska Dagbladet, 2010; Iran Focus, 2010 ; Radio Sweden, 2010). The Iranian diaspora living in Scandinavian countries has also been effective, as Ashtiani has been freed or recruited.

The vast majority of the Iranian diaspora, as opposed to the current Iranian regime, is an indirect or direct negative factor in Scandinavia-Iran relations. As a matter of fact, the Iranian diaspora, which has a heterogeneous structure, can follow different policies. The Iranian diaspora in Scandinavia chooses a rather criticizing approach rather than play an intermediary role in the relations between the country where they live and their motherland. This causes a negative reaction to Iran in the public opinion of the relevant countries.

## **CONCLUSION**

Given the historical process, Iranian-Scandinavian relations have followed a positive trend in general terms. The Scandinavian countries have invested in Iran since the Shah regime, given expert support, and especially not pursuing hegemonic policies have led to the emergence of a positive image of them in the Iran's public opinion. For this reason, Iran has preferred Scandinavian countries rather than the Western countries that follow "imperial policies" through investments in the historical process. Iran and P5 + 1 countries have reached an agreement on nuclear negotiations in 2015, and it has come to abolish sanctions to Iran which was an important step towards the development of bilateral relations with Scandinavian countries. Iran is represented in Scandinavian countries by the embassy, which is regarded as

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the highest diplomatic authority. A number of agreements have been signed between Iran and Scandinavian countries in the areas of education, health, technology, trade, energy and transport. However, these agreements were negatively affected by international sanctions and were not fully passed on. Iran is demanding that signed agreements enter into force as soon as possible.

It is possible to summarize the relations of Iran with the Scandinavian countries with the following items:

- Iran will have the feature of being a market that encourages the appetite of the Scandinavian countries when considering the young population and the economic situation it has.
- Iran-Scandinavia trade is directly affected by sanctions. In the event of mitigation or removal of sanctions, Scandinavian companies have the potential to be in significant investments in sectors such as energy, pharmaceuticals, agriculture, food products and the airline.
- Scandinavian governments and the public will be skeptical about developing bilateral relations as long as issues such as human rights in Iran, women's freedom and death penalty are on the agenda.
- Sweden, as a representative of a feminist foreign policy in the world, appears to be an extraordinary and unfavorable model for Iran.
- The Iranian diaspora living in Scandinavian countries is also operating against the current regime of Iran. This leads to sensitivities in bilateral relations.
- Because Iran is governed by a religious regime, the Iranian government is very sensitive to religious issues. Activities against Islam in Scandinavian countries, which are ahead of most European countries in terms of freedoms, lead to significant fragility in relations. The cartoon crisis is an obvious example of this.
- The fact that Iran is an important regional power in the Middle East has made it a suitable investment place for Scandinavian countries.
- Scandinavian countries are a member of the UN Security Council from time to time and play a key role in the development of relations with Iran.
- The Scandinavian countries, which will make significant developments in the industrial field if the sanctions imposed on Iran are fully abolished, will be able to help Iran in technology transfer.

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Iran believes that Scandinavian countries can play a constructive role, especially in strengthening ties between Tehran and the EU. But Sweden does not want to be independent of the EU or make an initiative on its own. Sweden follows a "cautious" policy as a reaction to public opinion and as a result of the foreign policy it follows. In general and the public media in Scandinavia; Iran is perceived as a pressure based administration, a country that is insecure, does not value women's rights, and supports terrorism. It remains unclear how the Scandinavian countries, which are highly sensitive to human rights and freedoms, will enter into a stalemate in relations with Iran in the coming days. It is also difficult to find an answer to the question "How far can the application of feminist foreign policy, a model of Sweden, a country that focuses on trade issues, follows an impartial policy on foreign policy go with Iran? The implementation of the agreement with P5 + 1 countries and the attitude of US President Donald J. Trump will be decisive factors in the relations between Scandinavian countries and Iran, which have great differences in terms of foreign policy and income level.

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