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Foreign Minister **Paolo Gentiloni** said Italy will raise the case of detained Washington Post reporter Jason Rezaian during Iranian President Hassan Rouhani's visit to Rome. A8

As Rouhani visits Italy to raise Post reporter's jailing



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Paolo Gentiloni, Italy's foreign minister, spoke as Iran's Hassan Rouhani was preparing to make his first trip to Europe as president.

Rome's top envoy says resolution of case could help an emerging Iran

BY ANTHONY FAIOLA

ROME — Italian Foreign Minister **Paolo Gentiloni** said his country will raise the case of detained Washington Post Tehran correspondent Jason Rezaian during Iranian President Hassan Rouhani's visit to Rome on Saturday, saying a resolution of the matter would help build confidence in the wake of Iran's landmark nuclear deal with world powers.

Rezaian has been held for more than a year and was recently convicted of espionage and other charges, though The Post and

international media groups say he is innocent and acted solely as a journalist. Iran also recently arrested Dubai-based Iranian American Siamak Namazi, which brought to four the number of Americans with dual citizenship being held there.

In a lengthy interview with The Post, **Gentiloni** said he has already raised the issue of Rezaian's detention with Iranian officials. The Italians, he said, will again bring up the case with Rouhani, who is making his first trip to Europe as president. Rouhani also will meet with Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi. On a trip being billed as the beginning of Iran's emergence from economic isolation from the West, Rouhani will also meet with Pope Francis before moving on to France.

Below are edited excerpts from

the interview:

The economic sanctions against Iran affected Italy hard?

Yes. Not only Italy. Other European countries, as well. We are now at the first step, and . . . we are not yet even at so-called implementation day. To arrive there, we need the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] to verify a certain number of issues. We know that the process has a very clear track, and the visit of President Rouhani will be an opportunity to start to consolidate our economic and cultural cooperation. But implementation is connected to their progress.

What are the potential sticking points?

I think what is at stake is mostly political, rather than connected to technical details. In

Iran, we know they have elections next February and the public debate could be dominated by two connected issues. One is economics, and the other, relations with the West and the United States. So I think that the problem is not this or that or another technical element connected to the IAEA, but that the political will of the leaders who decided this deal in Vienna remains on track.

What could help keep things on track?

Obviously, there is something that could help to build more confidence. The minimum necessary is to respect what was signed, and that depends on political will. But apart from this, there is something else that could help build confidence and facilitate relations between the U.S. and Iran, or even between Iran, the U.S. and Europe. One issue is the situation concerning a certain number of American citizens. Your colleague [Rezaian] and another two or three U.S. citizens. A solution of this issue could be not only a step in the right direction from a humanitarian point of view, but a contribution toward facilitating the whole process. If possible, European countries — Italy, as far as we are concerned — could try to help to not only raise this issue but to try and find solutions.

Will Italy raise Jason's case with the Iranians this weekend?

For sure. And we have already raised it before. We are raising

these issues not to create a scandal but to try to make a contribution toward solving the problem. A solution not only for humanitarian reasons, but to create the right atmosphere. Another issue that could help is the potential of what is happening this Saturday in Vienna, where we will have the second round of negotiations on Syria.

Will you be asking the Iranians to cooperate more on Syria?

I think the Iranians could accept the idea that there is a possible transition, with an opening to a different governance from the one that we now have, and, at a certain point, arrive not at regime change, but to the fact that Bashar al-Assad is not the one in charge. They are not accepting this idea, but I hope for a compromise in the next negotiations.

How do you interpret the recent signs that hard-liners in Iran are toughening their stance at home?

I am not in a position to be accurate on news analysis. But what I firmly believe is that Iranian President Rouhani and the government have committed themselves to a process. I don't think this process is about changing the principles of the Islamic republic, but it is about accepting a certain path of opening in the political and economic fields. This is what, from our point of view, is crucial.

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