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## Lisbon Treaty could be EU's pipeline to better energy security

**OPINION:** *About 70 per cent of Russia's oil and gas exports go to the EU. It is in Moscow's interest that the Lisbon Treaty fails, and there is no collective EU voice negotiating a single energy supply deal for all member states, writes **Tim Bourke***

THE NOTION that the rejection of the Lisbon Treaty by the Irish people was cost-free and without adverse consequences for Ireland, and more broadly for the European project, is severely challenged when the outcome is placed in its wider geopolitical context.

This appears evident when the consequences of the Irish No vote on the Lisbon Treaty are examined through the prism of energy politics, particularly those concerning oil and gas.

Last month, the Institute of International and European Affairs (IIEA) hosted a major international energy co-operation roundtable in Farmleigh House in Dublin. This roundtable, under the aegis of the Asia-Europe Environment Forum (Asef) and representing more than 40 countries throughout the Eurasian region, addressed the energy sustainability challenge facing the world and the urgent need to fuel greater co-operation between Asia and Europe.

Russia is not a member of Asef and was therefore not represented at the Dublin roundtable, which was the sixth in a series of eight held in the region over the past four years. Speaking at the conference, the executive director of the International Energy Agency (IEA) based in Paris, Nobuo Tanaka from Japan, warned that growing environmental concerns, coupled with the energy security problem, make the need for global co-operation critical.

Perhaps more pertinently, and somewhat closer to home, Tanaka was passionate on the need for the European Union in particular to present a more unified front in the interests of its energy security needs, especially in the face of Russia's desire to ensure maintenance of the status quo.

As of now, about 30 per cent of EU imports come from Russia, and 70 per cent of Russia's exports of oil and gas go to the EU. Tanaka concluded that both sides must recognise that they are in a relationship of dependency and the EU must realise that its dependency is in fact increased while the EU remains divided.

The importance of this view in the context of the outcome of the referendum in Ireland on the Lisbon Treaty cannot be ignored.

The Lisbon Treaty includes provisions to create a more workable EU common energy policy by transferring national competences in the areas of energy efficiency and energy security to a common institutional European forum.

Up to now, with the key energy competences resting with the individual member states of the union, the European Commission's attempts to create an integrated European energy policy have been frustrated by a diverse range of competing national strategies.

This lack of co-ordinated policy is well-illustrated by Germany's bilateral energy agreements with Russia, most notably the current pipeline under construction by way of the Baltic Sea that bypasses the Baltic member states and Poland.

Both Irish and European citizens need to understand that, for a variety of complex geopolitical reasons, it is in fact in Russia's interest to maintain this pre-Lisbon Treaty status quo. This is the case because if the Lisbon Treaty proceeds, it would signal the emergence of a more dynamic and integrated pan-European approach to managing Europe's oil and gas energy markets.

When looked at through this energy prism, this would effectively alter the current balance of power between the EU and Russia and create greater interdependency between both parties. In this scenario, Russia would therefore be as dependent on the EU importing its energy as the EU would be dependent on Russia exporting it.

The consequences of a lack of such interdependency were highlighted by recent Russian actions to curtail gas supplies to some of the former Soviet republics - Belarus, Ukraine and Estonia. More recently, the Czechs also felt the brunt of this new energy weapon.

This is not to imply that Russia is interested in fighting an energy war. However, it is interested in using energy as a weapon to advance its security agenda.

This agenda is enshrined in its "inner abroad" strategic approach to the security of its borders, which was illustrated during the recent Georgian conflict over South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

The energy security implications of this conflict and its outcome are that it has increased Russia's influence in the region and, as a consequence, increases Europe's already heavy energy dependence on Russia. The strategic significance of the pipeline from Azerbaijan through Georgia and on to the Black Sea for European markets is immense and effectively serves to increase Europe's reliance on Russia.

These kinds of developments underline the overriding importance of a more unified EU energy policy which the Lisbon Treaty would help facilitate. In this regard, the Georgian conflict, which has led to deep concerns about Russia-EU energy relations, should serve to remind Europeans that Russia will not readily allow the inner abroad of its former republics to cede from its sphere of influence, including those in Central Asia - and particularly the energy resource-rich Kazakhstan.

Moreover, many policy analysts would argue that despite the Baltic states' membership of the EU, they still remain to a significant degree within the sphere of influence of Russia's inner abroad strategy, not least due to their large indigenous Russian populations.

Ukraine remains strategically important because of its port of Sevastopol. This is home to the Russian Black Sea fleet and is pivotal to its security and defence considerations, and to its economic and energy interests.

Many factors contribute to Russia's overriding concern for the security of its borders, including the threat posed by Islamic fundamentalism. In the main, however, much of the thrust of Russia's foreign policy is largely a mirror image of its energy policy.

A wider and deeper understanding of this state of affairs on the part of the citizens of Europe and their respective member states and the urgent need for the EU to address this mutually volatile state of affairs is long overdue.

Without ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, the EU does not have the necessary institutional and policy competences to do this effectively. This lack of competence threatens both energy security and greater stability in the geopolitical system in terms of stable relations with Russia and, more generally, the stability of the international political system as a whole.

Ireland is far from immune from these harsh realities of interdependence in an increasingly globalised but fragile world.

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