

[Comment] Europe needs a policy of energy

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EUOBSERVER / COMMENT - Those were strong words from Polish defence minister Radek Sikorski at the weekend, comparing the proposed new pipeline between Russia and Germany with the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939.

What a way to mark the second anniversary of Polish membership of the EU.

His complaint is that the German government planned this project without reference to the interests of their immediate eastern neighbour. A pipeline under the Baltic Sea could be used to divide up the European countries and cut some of them off.

Poland joined the EU in search of security in an uncertain world – the Poles perhaps have more experience than most of how uncertain the world can be – and a fragmented approach to relations with Russia is not what they thought they were inheriting.

Looking back to the constitution

On this issue, as on so many others, we can look back to the constitutional treaty.

One of the very few new policies proposed for the EU (the eurosceptics were wrong when they said there were lots) was a more coherent approach to energy policy.

Article III-256 proposed that the EU should take on as explicit objectives a functioning energy market, security of supply, and environmental sustainability.

The right of member states to manage their own indigenous energy resources and the choice between different fuels was nevertheless to be protected. How many times did we hear the false argument that "Brussels" wanted to get its hands on North Sea oil?

Sadly, of course, in the two years since Poland joined the European Union, the constitutional treaty has been rejected in two referendums. Article III-256 remains as a proposal rather than part of the European basic law.

Revival of the idea of Europe

If the treaty is revived, in one form or another, I hope that Polish critics of the EU will look again at the need for a coherent European energy policy.

But there is a lesson also for the advocates of the revival of the treaty, chief among them the coalition government of Germany.

The rejection of the treaty in those two referendums last year was a symptom and not a cause. The cause was a lack of trust by the voters in the European idea. Promises had been made and not kept. No wonder people were sceptical.

So to revive the treaty means first to revive the idea of Europe. The reasons for a united Europe need to be expressed, not only the means by which it might happen.

And it is not credible to talk about the need for European policies but then to duck them at the crucial moments. That pipeline under the sea will be a monument to an opportunity lost.

The German government cannot ask other countries to support the wording of the constitutional treaty if it will not respect its spirit. That means seeking cooperative solutions to European problems in the interests of the whole of Europe, and not divisive solutions in the

interests of one member state and against the interests of another.

It may need some tough decisions, but that is what we elect our political leaders for. Europe's leaders need to come back to the European question with new energy of their own.

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