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As the world looks for alternative energy sources, *Poland Monthly's* Tomasz Ćwiok talks to Iranian Ambassador to Poland Hadi Farajvand about the prospect of increasing business links between the two countries touching on a few sensitive political issues.

Ćwiok: Business relations between Poland and Iran do not have an impressive history. What is your take on that?

Farajvand: The volume of trade relations between Poland and Iran is small and far less than what I would consider to be satisfactory. My plan now is to establish and promote bilateral contacts between Iranian and Polish firms. I will try to facilitate exchanges involving different delegations so that they can find a common ground for cooperation. I am also trying to ease the exchange of information between Polish and Iranian companies.

Ćwiok: It seems that trade and business relations between our countries are starting from scratch...

Farajvand: Indeed, when it comes to the list of countries that Iran does business with, Poland looks like a newcomer. Traditionally companies in Iran did business with companies in the West, so now we have to familiarize ourselves with what Poland has to offer.

Ćwiok: Yet recently the *Tehran Times* reported that Iranian Offshore Oil Company (IOOC) and Polish gas monopoly PGNiG, were in talks to sign a USD 2bn deal to explore gas in the Lavan field...

Farajvand: I am not aware of the details of the deal. All I can say is that with regard to oil and gas reserves, we are the most reliable source of energy. We have the second-largest natural reserves of gas in the world, and this field of industry is expanding in Iran. So when it comes to gas, we would welcome cooperation and even investment from a Polish company. We can also cooperate on producing petrochemicals. Poland has the potential to not only be a good market in its own right, but also a platform for exporting these products to other European countries. I have to add that Iran is the second most reliable source of natural gas, after Russia. As Poland and the European Union want to diversify the origins of their gas and oil, we are ready to become a gas and oil supplier. If we are asked to join the Naboko pipeline project, and we have been invited to participate in the consortium, we can enter a long-term cooperation agreement to supply natural gas to Europe, including Poland. The cooperation between Poland and Iran in the energy sector is even more promising, as Polish companies have worked in Iran in

the past. They specialized in drilling for oil and this cooperation can continue.

Ćwiok: Apart from energy and petrochemicals in what other areas do you think our countries could potentially cooperate?

Farajvand: Apart from energy, the potential for cooperation between Poland and Iran lies in many fields such as agriculture, fishery, shipping, transportation, machinery, medicine, civil engineering and mining as well as automotive manufacturing. There is a huge amount of potential.

Ćwiok: What goods can Iran offer Poland?

Farajvand: Iranian companies can supply Poland with cars and spare parts, and help in the production of ships, trucks, and heavy machinery. We believe that Iran can help Poland accomplish ambitious projects relating to improving road infrastructure and we are working on dispatching a delegation of experts from Iranian construction companies in the future.

Ćwiok: What other activities are planned on a government level to encourage business links with Poland?

Farajvand: As the volume of trade and the level of cooperation between Iranian and Polish companies is on a very small scale indeed, we are thinking of establishing a joint trade council. The Iranian-Polish Chamber of Commerce will aim to facilitate trade and commerce, and if it proves successful will boost trade and economic cooperation. [the presidents of both chambers signed a MoU in July this year, showing their support for the chamber being established – editor's note.] We have already discussed this idea with the Polish Chamber of Commerce (KIG) and soon a delegation from the Iranian Chamber of Commerce will visit Poland. The delegation will be headed by the Chairman of the Iranian Chamber of Commerce, who will be accompanied by a number of Iranian business representatives. In addition, there will be some people from construction companies among this delegation, who are looking for business opportunities in the construction sector, particularly roads.

Ćwiok: But when you look at the political context, with Poland's allegiance lying with the EU and the West, it seems that Poland and Iran are on opposite sides...

Farajvand: We consider Poland a very important country in the European Union. That's why our goal is to develop good bilateral relations both in trade and commerce as well as in politics. There is no obstacle as we see it, in promoting bilateral relations with Poland. Before I left for Poland, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad told me that there are no barriers to developing relations in all areas. There are some differences in our political views, but there are no major problems. I consider our relations with Poland to be very friendly.

Ćwiok: Poland is withdrawing its troops from Iraq this year. Do you think that may have a positive impact on our relationship?

Farajvand: We believe that it was a wise decision to withdraw from Iraq. The main pretext for extremists to be in Iraq and commit terrorist acts is the occupation of Iraq. There are terrorists and extremists from different countries, who go to Iraq on the basis that Iraq is an Islamic country that is occupied by foreign forces. So when the occupants withdraw from Iraq this reasoning will no longer be valid and there will be no justification for those extremists to go there.

Ćwiok: Yet Poland is still getting engaged in the US missile defence programme. What do you think about that?

Farajvand: We think Poland's decision to house the missile shield is its own internal affair. Iran has no missiles which are a threat to Europe and there are no plans to produce such missiles because there is no reason to threaten European countries. We have no reason to feel any threat from Europe either. So we don't believe this shield is designed to counter a threat from our country. We have a lot in common with European nations and we cooperate with European countries when it comes to fighting terrorism and extremism in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as drug trafficking. We cooperate over energy security in the Middle East and in the Persian Gulf. If Poland wants to host a part of the missile-shield system, we have no objection.

The main consideration, however, is that since the system is a strategic anti-missile installation, it is designed to counter the threat from Russia. It can also be seen as an attempt to gain military superiority, which has been the main consideration of American strategists throughout its history. In my view, housing the missile shield may compromise Poland's security.

Ćwiok: Another sensitive issue is the Iranian Nuclear Programme. What is your opinion of sanctions imposed on your country by the United Nation's Security Council in connection with the programme?

Farajvand: From the very beginning the issue of our nuclear programme was handled by a few countries that are members of the In-

ternational Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in a very political manner. Some countries claim that we started our nuclear programme 18 years ago, which is not true. We started our nuclear programme in 1956. At that time we established our first contact with the US, and the first experimental nuclear reactor was built in Iran by the US. In the 1970s, the US carried out a comprehensive study in Iran and suggested that Iran should build a 20MW nuclear power plant by 1995. After the 1979 revolution, when Iran turned from a country that was loyal to the US into a country, which is independently pursuing its own international relations policy, the US changed its attitude towards Iran. Since then the US has been trying to put pressure on Iran at any opportunity. So the nuclear issue is not a new issue to us. In fact, we have been investing in our nuclear programme for five decades. Today every Iranian university has a course in nuclear physics. We have thousands of scientists who have graduated from nuclear physics. Their studies are based on technologies introduced to Iran by the US and other Western countries such as the UK, France and Germany. Today there is no jus-



Potential for cooperation between Poland and Iran lies in many fields, not just energy.

tification for abandoning those five decades of investment. With the pace at which oil consumption is increasing today and without such nuclear power plants, in a few years our capacity to export oil and gas would shrink to such an extent that Iran would no longer be able to provide oil and gas to the international market.

Ćwiok: What is your view on the sanctions?

Farajvand: We have managed to survive sanctions in the past and we will do so again. We have three million university students. Every year a huge amount of highly-trained and educated people go into the workforce to support and develop our economy. In fact, we can produce anything ourselves inside our own borders.

Ćwiok: And what is your take on alternative energy sources? Apart from nuclear energy, of course.

Farajvand: We have 7,000MW of hydroenergy and there are plans to build more dams in the country so the use of hydroelectric energy will increase. We have also been developing wind farms and there have been some developments in the field of solar energy. We have several trial solar panels, the largest of which has been installed in central province of Yazd, a desert area where levels of sunlight are very high.