# EU adopts measures against Turkey's illegal drilling in Cyprus' EEZ

The European Union decided on Monday to symbolically punish Turkey over illegal drilling for oil and gas off Cyprus and threatened harsher sanctions in the future unless Ankara changes tack. Foreign affairs ministers of the 28-nation bloc met in Brussels to endorse a decision to curb diplomatic contacts and funding for Ankara, retaliation for what it sees as interference with Cyprus' exclusive economic zone. Cyprus has pressed for a tough line threatening harsher sanctions in the future but others warned against antagonising a key ally on security and migration affairs. "The provocations of Turkey are unacceptable to all of us," German Minister of State for Europe Michel Roth said on arriving at the talks. "We have now found a balanced language that keeps all our options open, including of course sanctions." "I can only hope that we do not now add another crisis to the many conflicts and crises. Turkey knows what's at stake and the European Union is united on the side of Cyprus." An EU diplomat told Reuters Ankara could lose some €150m of €400m the bloc had earmarked for 2020 for everything from political reforms to agriculture projects to help Turkey prepare for eventual EU membership. A decision endorsed by the EU ministers invited the bloc's executive and foreign policy arm to "continue work on options for targeted measures in the light of Turkey's continued drilling activities", according to the text seen by Reuters. That means any future sanctions would most likely focus narrowly on freezing assets and banning from the EU firms or people involved in the drilling, diplomats in Brussels said. "It is very clear that we stand behind Cyprus, this makes sense since we never recognised the Turkish occupation of northern Cyprus. It is normal for Cyprus to want to define their own natural resources," Austrian Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg said on Monday. According to the final text seen by CNA the 28 recall "the Council conclusions of 18 June 2019 and previous European Council conclusions, notably those of 20 June 2019", and "deplores that, despite the European Union`s repeated calls to cease its illegal activities in the Eastern Mediterranean, Turkey continued its drilling operations west of Cyprus and launched a second drilling operation northeast of Cyprus within Cypriot territorial waters". The Council reiterates "the serious immediate negative impact that such illegal actions have across the range of EU-Turkey relations. The Council calls again on Turkey to refrain from such actions, act in a spirit of good neighbourliness and respect the sovereignty and sovereign rights of Cyprus in accordance with international law". Furthermore, "the Council, welcoming the invitation by the Government of Cyprus to negotiate with Turkey, notes that delimitation of exclusive economic zones and continental shelf should be addressed through dialogue and negotiation in good faith, in full respect of international law and in accordance with the principle of good neighbourly relations". "The EU remains fully committed to supporting the UN-led efforts to work with the parties with a view to creating the conditions conducive to resuming negotiations on a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem", the text reads. "In this regard, the Council recalls that it remains crucial that Turkey commits and contributes to such a settlement, including its external aspects, within the UN framework in accordance with relevant UNSC Resolutions and in line with the principles on which the EU is founded and the acquis", the EU 28 state in the same text. According to EU sources, the Council will publish the text around 11pm Cyprus time. High Representative Federica Mogherini, refrained from commenting on the decisions during the Council's press conference. (Reports from Reuters and CNA in Brussels) https://cyprus-mail.com/2019/07/15/eu-adopts-measures-against-turkeys-illegal-drilling-in-cyprus-eez/amp/?__twitter_impression=true

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# Qatar Steps over the Blockade

**Gerald Butt, Petroleum Economist**

Two years after the economic and political boycott on Qatar, the Gulf state is pressing on with LNG expansion plans. Qatar Petroleum (QP) in April asked three joint ventures to bid for the main engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) contract for four mega-LNG trains, each with 8.8mn t/yr capacity, and related facilities. A month later it asked firms to bid to carry out EPC work for LNG storage and loading facilities. QP announced in 2017, after the boycott was imposed, that it planned to increase LNG output capacity from 77mn t/yr to 100mn t/yr, by producing more gas from the vast offshore North field. The following year it unveiled an even more ambitious plan – to target capacity of 110mn t/yr. And despite the fact that there is no end to the political dispute that has destroyed the credibility of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Qatar is not looking back. The consortiums competing for the contracts to build the mega-trains are: Chiyoda and Technip; JGC Corporation and Hyundai Engineering and Construction; and Saipem, McDermott and CTCI Corporation. The announcement of the EPC contract is expected in January 2020, with work to be completed by 2024. Qatar believes that the new development will come on stream just as demand for LNG will start to exceed supply. McDermott International has been given the EPC role for eight new offshore jackets in the North field. Onshore site preparation for the four LNG trains at Ras Laffan is being carried out by Consolidated Contractors Company and Teyseer Trading and Contracting Company. Chiyoda is completing the FEED work for the onshore facilities, and further contract awards related to the expansion project are expected in the coming months.  *Saad al-Kaabi Minister of Energy and Chairman of QP* **New LNG carriers** To cater for the North Field expansion and Qatar's offtake from the Golden Pass LNG export project in the US, QP in April issued an invitation to tender for the construction of LNG carriers. QP CEO Saad al-Kaabi says the initial order would be to "deliver 60 LNG carriers in support of the planned production expansion, with a potential to exceed 100 new carriers over the next decade". 110mn t/yr – Qatar's planned LNG capacity  *Roudi Baroudi Energy Economist* During 2018, Qatar maintained its position as the largest exporter of LNG, with 28pc of global market share, according to the International Gas Union. However, with other countries increasing capacity, Qatar's share has been falling. Australia has now overtaken Qatar as the biggest producer –

but will be nudged out of that spot when the Ras Laffan expansion is complete. **Call for talks** In the meantime, Qatar continues to call for talks to end the political dispute with its neighbours, but they appear to have no interest in ending the boycott. “The countries besieging Qatar know it is ready to sit down at the negotiating table, whether under the aegis of the GCC or any other set-up,” says Roudi Baroudi, a Doha-based energy consultant. “Qatari officials remain hopeful that their counterparts will soon change course and join the search for sovereign, fair and workable solutions.” For now at least, Qatar is prepared to carry on regardless – without undue concern. The IMF said in late 2018 that “significant fiscal and external buffers have enabled Qatar to successfully absorb the adverse shocks from the 2014-16 decline in oil prices and the diplomatic rift. We anticipate overall real GDP growth of 3.1pc in 2019, with still robust non-hydrocarbon growth and recovery in oil and gas production.”

In Baroudi’s view, “while Qataris continue to face illegal and discriminatory measures attached to the commercial blockade, their country has the wherewithal to sustain the current situation for as long as it takes”.

**Original article by Gerald Butt, Petroleum Economist**

https://www.petroleum-economist.com/articles/politics-economics/middle-east/2019/qatar-steps-over-the-blockade

# Exclusive: Russian output falls to three-year low as oil rivals clash


MOSCOW (Reuters) – Russian oil production fell close to a three-year low in early July, as output was undermined by a row between Russian oil pipeline monopoly Transneft (TRNF_p.MM) and the country's biggest producer Rosneft (ROSN.MM). Transneft curbed oil intake from Yuganskneftegaz, Rosneft's main upstream unit, the oil producer said, hurting production that has already been depressed by an oil contamination crisis. Rosneft confirmed intake limits first reported by Reuters. Transneft also confirmed to local media it had capped the amount of oil received from Yuganskneftegaz. Transneft said it put the restrictions in place after Rosneft sent oil to the pipeline network without clearly stating the destination for 3.5 million tonnes of crude as of July 1, local news agencies reported. It said it had limited intake from Yuganskneftegaz by 0.5 percent of its annual production, TASS reported. The unit produces more than 70 million tonnes of oil annually, or 1.4 million barrels per day. Industry sources said Russian oil output fell to 10.79 million barrels per day (bpd) in early July, lower than the level agreed under a deal on curbing supply reached with OPEC and other producers. Transneft and Rosneft have been at loggerheads over efforts to resolve the problem of contaminated oil found in April in the Druzhba export pipeline to Europe. Supplies have only partially resumed since then, after weeks of disruption. Transneft criticized Rosneft on Monday over its handling of the tainted oil issue, saying the oil producer had dragged its feet over setting up quality controls for its oil and had made unsubstantiated claims from the pipeline firm. Rosneft said it had read Transneft's remarks with "regret". The heads of the two firms, Rosneft's Igor Sechin and Nikolai Tokarev at Transneft, have often rowed in the past. Despite formally denying any strife between their CEOs, the two companies have often clashed over issues such as oil transportation fees and Rosneft's rising oil exports to China. Sechin, 58, has been close to President Vladimir Putin for two decades, while Tokarev, 68, is also a long-time ally. Putin, Tokarev and Sechin all worked in the city administration for St Petersburg in the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union. When asked to comment on the row, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on a daily conference call that it was a "corporate matter". Transneft transports 83% of Russian oil via its network, while Rosneft accounts for over 40% of Russian output. An industry source said oil output at Yuganskneftegaz in West Siberia fell 30% during July 1-8 compared with the June average. Rosneft said its oil production had declined due to a decision by Transneft to reduce intake of oil due to the contaminated oil issue, adding Transneft had imposed a "significant" cap on oil intake from Yuganskneftegaz. "The enforced output reduction is related to

Transneft’s cuts of intake of oil into the system of trunk pipelines,” a Rosneft spokesman said, adding that the pipelines were blocked by contaminated crude.

Reporting by Alla Afanasyeva, Olga Yagova and Dmitry Zhdannikov; additional reporting by Tom Balmforth; Editing by Edmund Blair, Louise Heavens and Kirsten Donovan

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# Emissions rules and electric shift to spur car engines M&A


Mergers and acquisitions have been stuck in a rut since Volkswagen (VOWG_p.DE) was caught cheating pollution tests in 2015, triggering a global tightening of emissions regulations that depressed the value of petrol and diesel technologies.

But the market is beginning to separate companies capable of meeting new emissions standards from those struggling to do so, which could close the gap in price expectations between buyers and sellers over the next 12-24 months, industry experts say. The auto industry has all but stopped developing next-generation combustion engines as limited resources are directed towards building electric and self-driving cars. However, electric vehicles are still a niche product, accounting for only 1.26 million – or 1.5 percent – of the 86 million cars sold worldwide last year, and analysts forecast it will be the middle of the next decade before a tipping point comes when electric cars overtake combustion-engined variants. That means there will still be demand for emissions-compliant combustion engines and so manufacturers and suppliers able to offer that are likely to see valuations recover, said Reinhard Kuehn, co-head of European Automotive at Deutsche Bank. "At the same time, suppliers that struggle with this will remain a hard sell," Kuehn said. Meanwhile, as production capacity of petrol and diesel engines is cut back, the impetus for mergers among suppliers should increase, bankers believe. Germany's Volkswagen, one of the largest manufacturers of petrol and diesel engines, has said it will develop its final generation of combustion engines by 2026, while U.S. rival Ford (F.N) last month said it would close two engine factories in Europe. "The profit pool of companies with combustion engine-related technology – once the envy of the industry – is shrinking with the rise of electric vehicles and the digitization of the industry," Goldman Sachs managing director Axel Hoefer said. "You would expect someone to come in and consolidate to benefit from economies of scale." Volkswagen is now warning its suppliers to prepare industry-wide solutions for winding down combustion-engine manufacturing as it ramps up mass production of electric vehicles. The company is retooling 16 factories to build electric vehicles and plans to start producing 33 different electric cars under the Skoda, Audi, VW and Seat brands by mid-2023, transforming the industry's supply chain. "It makes no sense to have factories running at only 40% capacity," Stefan Sommer, Volkswagen's procurement head, told Reuters. "The auto industry is obliged to develop structures to consolidate combustion engine assets, to decide where to bundle certain activities." "If we end up with uncontrolled insolvencies, it will be a problem for the industry," he said.

## MISMATCH

There are more than 120 plants making combustion engine components in Europe, according to consulting firm AlixPartners. German auto industry association VDA says 436,000 jobs are tied to building petrol and diesel engines in Germany alone. Demand for compliant combustion engine assets has already triggered consolidation among carmakers themselves – PSA Group's (PEUP.PA) takeover of General Motors' (GM.N) Opel business in 2017 was driven by that issue. "With emissions regulation getting more stringent, particularly in Europe, some manufacturers are getting left behind in terms of their ability to develop compliant engines," Franciscus van Meel, BMW's (BMWG.DE) head of vehicle development, told Reuters. Until recently, deals have still proved difficult to do because of lingering disagreements over valuations. U.S. group Dana (DAN.N) late in 2018 launched the sale of its European head gasket business, a key component for combustion engines, people close to the matter said. With the help of Bank of America it invited suitors to bid, but pulled the auction several weeks later due to muted interest. The sale of Germany's closely-held Ifa Group, a maker of shafts mainly used in combustion engine-powered cars, was announced a year ago, but never got over the finishing line. Among the few suitors was China's Wanxiang, but differences on pricing proved insurmountable, people close to the talks said. "The main problem is that buyers' and sellers' price expectations don't match," KPMG partner Juergen Schlangenotto said. "A seller typically says: I have a robust order book and good margins so I want a valuation of 6 times EBITDA (annual core earnings), while a buyer says there’s no long-term growth so I am paying 4 times.” A fresh test of interest in combustion engine assets will be the sale of engine parts and gear box parts maker Tekfor. Private equity owner KKR is in talks with a Chinese buyer, according to people close to the matter. James Kamsickas, CEO of U.S. drivetrain supplier Dana, believes internal combustion engine (ICE) demand could persist for many years. “People are overbaking a little bit on how much the internal combustion engine is just going to go away,” he told Reuters. “If anything, I’m a very strong advocate that it’s going to be a world of hybridization for the next 15 years. Last time I checked, that still requires an ICE.”

Editing by Georgina Prodhan and Mark Potter

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# China refiners curb fuel output after massive new plants stoke glut

Reuters/Singapore/Beijing

China’s fuel producers are making extended curbs to their output in the third quarter after supply from mammoth new refineries stoked an already-sizeable glut, potentially dragging on crude oil demand from the world’s biggest importer of the commodity. Private refiner Hengli Petrochemical ramped up its 400,000-barrels per day (bpd) plant in northeast China to full capacity in May, while Zhejiang Petrochemical began trial runs around the same time at a similar-sized refinery on the east coast. In the wake of that wave of fresh supply and amid slowing local demand for fuels such as gasoline and diesel, refiners are cutting their crude processing, or throughput, industry sources and analysts said. That drop should sap their appetite for crude imports, pulling down on international oil prices that have already been hit by fears over a slowing global economy. The swollen surplus of fuel products could also send China’s fuel exports surging to new highs and further pinch Asian refining profits. “For markets that are already consumed with fears about a global recession…headline numbers of oil demand growth slowing alongside talk of run cuts seem to reinforce a bearish narrative,” said Michal Meidan, a London-based analyst at Energy Aspects. Small-scale refiners known as ‘teapots’, mainly located in Shandong province, are coming under most pressure to make fresh output cuts, analysts said, extending curbs many of them made in May and June. Teapots have been seen as a bellwether for China's oil demand since 2015 when they became first-time crude oil importers. They now make up a fifth of the nation's total crude imports. Dongming Petrochemical Group, the province's largest independent refinery, is closing its 240,000-bpd plant this week for two months of maintenance in the wake of "poor margins", according to a company source. That comes after plants were losing 300-350 yuan ($44-$51) on each tonne of crude oil they processed in June, their largest such loss in nearly four years, said Shi Linlin, an analyst at consultancy JLC, and analyst Wang Zhao at Sublime China Information, another consultancy in the province. Seven plants in Shandong – including Dongming – with total crude processing capacity of 470,000 bpd will be offline in July for overhauls, JLC estimates. That's equivalent to a throughput cut of 14mn barrels of crude in July alone, or nearly 4% of the country's processing levels in May. Meanwhile, two major coastal plants run by Sinopec Corp, Asia's largest refiner, are planning to trim throughput by nearly 2%, or roughly 10,400 barrels per day, in July-September from the second quarter, plant sources said. That comes after these two plants were hit by refining losses in June for the first time this year. Sinopec did not respond to a request for comment. All refinery sources declined to be named as they were not authorised to speak to the media. The losses at small refiners come a month after behemoth Hengli cranked up operations at its plant in the northeastern port of Dalian. Hengli, traditionally a polyester maker, shipped its first gasoline cargo in early June. That was 80,000 tonnes sold to Sinopec at 5,300 yuan ($769.48) a tonne at an ex-plant rate, which is 700 yuan, or 12%, below prices offered by Shandong teapots, said two sources with direct knowledge of the transaction. The refiner in June placed a total of over 500,000 tonnes of gasoline at 300 to 500 yuan a tonne below market rates on average and sold a similar amount of off-specification diesel fuel with smaller discounts as its fuel quality has yet to stabilise, the sources said. “We were indeed marketing at promotional rates to build our customer base. But this is a temporary marketing strategy as we are new to the market,” said a Hengli spokesman, without elaborating. The Hengli and Zhejiang plants are together expected to account for about 6.4% of total Chinese crude oil throughput.

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# The ECB Needs to Explain Itself

Ambiguity is hampering effective policymaking by the European Central Bank and leaving market participants wondering what to expect. A review of the ECB’s policy framework would help to eliminate such ambiguity – and place the Bank on much sounder footing for a new era of leadership.

ZURICH – Finland’s central bank governor, Olli Rehn, has reiterated his call for the European Central Bank to conduct a long-overdue review of its policy framework. The upcoming change of leadership at the institution – with Christine Lagarde, the International Monetary Fund's managing director since 2011, likely to succeed Mario Draghi as president – offers an important opportunity to heed that call.

When the ECB was established 20 years ago, central banks were generally not too clear about the details of their policy frameworks. At that time, some ambiguity may have been helpful, because of the flexibility it offered when the ECB started operating. Furthermore, it allowed central bankers with different experiences and perspectives to agree on a framework, even though they may not have agreed on its precise details.

But the world has changed considerably since then, and the public is now demanding far more clarity. How can the ECB offer that, 16 years after the last review of its monetary-policy framework?

Since that review, conducted in 2003, the global financial crisis, and the ensuing European debt crisis, prompted the ECB to adopt a plethora of new policy instruments. These crisis measures – which have been deeply unpopular, particularly in Germany – can be justified only to the extent that they have been effective, and this must be evaluated. Moreover, as Rehn, who sits on the ECB's governing council, has noted, long-run structural trends – such as population aging, lower long-term interest rates, and climate change – must be considered.

The effectiveness of ECB policy requires the members of the governing council to be singing from the same song sheet. They need a shared understanding of Europe's long-term goals and the strengths and weaknesses of various policy instruments. And, in order to strengthen accountability and support smart decision-making, they need to be able to spell out the details of their monetary-policy strategies in ways that the public can understand.

As it stands, such clarity is at times hard to find, even when it comes to some of the most fundamental elements of the ECB’s policy strategy. Price stability – the ECB’s primary objective – is currently expressed as “inflation below, but close to, 2%.” Does 1% inflation meet that condition, or is it too low, demanding more monetary-policy accommodation? Different members of the ECB’s governing council may well have different answers to this question, and thus support different policies.

The same goes for the questions of whether the ECB’s inflation target is symmetric – with the authorities intervening as vigorously when inflation is too low as they do when inflation is too high – and whether inflation should be measured over time or at a given moment. If, over some period, the inflation rate ranges from 0% to 4%, but averages to “below, but close to, 2%,” has the objective been achieved?

The answer has major policy implications. If inflation is measured over time, the ECB could accept, or perhaps even aim for, a somewhat higher inflation rate in the medium term, to compensate for the excessively low inflation of recent years. If the public came to believe that a period of above-target inflation was likely, the expected real interest rate would fall, giving a jolt to the economy.

Of course, Draghi has established in speeches and press conferences that, in his view, the inflation target is symmetric; 1% inflation is too low; and the inflation rate should be measured over the “medium term.” But it is not clear whether this view is broadly shared within the ECB’s governing council.

Inflation targeting is hardly the only area where ambiguity is hampering effective policymaking and leaving market participants wondering what to expect. The ECB’s outright monetary transactions (OMT) scheme – whereby the ECB promises to purchase bonds issued by eurozone member states on secondary sovereign-bond markets – is also generating significant uncertainty.

OMT, Draghi's chosen tool for fulfilling his 2012 vow to do "whatever it takes to preserve the euro," was controversial from the moment it was announced, with Bundesbank President Jens Weidmann – one of Lagarde's main rivals for the ECB presidency – arguing fiercely against it in public. But that was seven years ago, and OMT has never actually been used. Is the governing council still committed to it? Or have the events – and council membership changes – of the last few years rendered that commitment obsolete?

With public debt in Greece and Italy still far too high, the eurozone still at risk of slipping into a recession that would significantly worsen both countries' fiscal positions, and Italian politics as volatile as ever, it would pay to know. A review of the kind Rehn demands would provide the needed answers – and put the ECB on much sounder footing for a new era of leadership.

STEFAN GERLACH

Writing for PS since **2016** Stefan Gerlach is Chief Economist at EFG Bank in Zurich and a former deputy governor of the Central Bank of Ireland. He is also a former Executive Director and Chief Economist of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority and Secretary to the Committee on the Global Financial System at the BIS.

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# EU ministers collide over

# timid eurozone reforms

Agence France Presse
LUXEMBOURG: EU finance ministers wrangled over watered-down economic reforms Thursday with France hoping the eurozone budget it has long been pushing for was finally within reach. Almost a decade after the debt crisis, French President Emmanuel Macron wants his partners to implement the changes in order to make the single currency area more resilient to shocks and to tackle the global dominance of the United States and China.But resistance to overhauling the eurozone has deepened, amid a budget row with populist-led Italy, and as richer northern countries grow reluctant to indulge the budget-busters to the south. This distrust and hesitance has plagued the eurozone since it was launched in 2002, a disunity that economists say limits growth and invites crisis.

Ministers are discussing France's flagship reform of a eurozone budget that has been scaled back by opponents led by the Netherlands that fear a transfer of wealth to Italy, Greece or Spain.

“We are not far from a consensus,” French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said on Thursday as he arrived for talks that were expected to last late into the night.

Such a step would be “a major breakthrough in strengthening the eurozone,” he said.

“We are close,” said German Finance Minister Olaf Scholz who added that approval was widespread for a Franco-German compromise on the delicate matter.

Not a budgetThe EU ministers are officially not negotiating a budget — which would be too politically sensitive — but something called the Budgetary Instrument for Competitiveness and Convergence, a fund with limited firepower to be used to back reforms.

The cumbersome renaming comes at the demand of the Dutch, who have only accepted the instrument on condition that it remains an extremely modest affair.

The skeleton of Macron’s plan on the table comes after months of negotiating the broad elements, including spending priorities, source of revenues, and who should ultimately wield control over its decisions

A European source said it was the last element that would keep ministers up late with the Netherlands and others insisting the budget remains under the auspices of the EU budget. As such, the budget’s firepower would remain at a modest 17 billion euros over seven years with no chance of expansion and under the authority of the EU’s 27 member states (after the exit of Britain).

Macron had originally demanded an amount of several hundred billion euros to be used to stabilize economically weak countries, but this was swiftly slapped down.

The young French leader also wanted the creation of a eurozone finance minister, an idea that was fast cast aside under pressure from Germany, which prefers that power over the economy remains national.

‘Impasse’Ignored for now is a Europe-wide deposit insurance scheme, which is supposed to be the last pillar of an EU banking union set up after a series of bank failures during the worst of the crisis.

“Regrettably, the impasse on this project is still there. No tangible progress has been made,” said EU commission vice president Valdis Dombrovskis on Wednesday.

The deposit scheme is resisted by Germany, Finland and other northern European countries that fear being put on the hook for deposits in fragile countries such as Italy or Greece. Ministers also discussed Italy with Rome in infraction of EU budget rules and in danger of major fines inflicted by its currency zone partners.

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# Gushing European energy IPO pipeline faces muted investor appetite

Norway’s Okea, Britain’s Neptune, Chrysaor, Siccar Point and Spirit Energy are all either actively preparing or expected to plan an initial public offering (IPO) in the short term, as are recently merged German-Russian Wintershall Dea and Israeli-owned Ithaca Energy.

Oil and gas companies with a combined value of around $41 billion are seen as candidates for listing in the coming years, according to estimates by energy consultancy Wood Mackenzie.

Shares of oil and gas companies historically rise after a crash in oil prices as investors bet on a recovery in prices.

But the recovery following the 2014 downturn, the worst in decades, has been slow and bumpy amid surging U.S. shale production and wider uncertainty over long-term oil demand as the world transitions to cleaner energy.

“IPOs tend to come when markets are sizzling hot and valuations are high – that is not the case for the energy sector currently,” said Bertrand Born, portfolio manager for global equities at German asset manager DWS.

Listed oil and gas companies have struggled in recent years, underperforming in many cases oil prices and other sectors, and offering a tough backdrop for any company contemplating a public listing.

In a sign of the challenging conditions, Okea on Thursday lowered its offered price per share and delayed its listing on the Oslo stock exchange.

Sam Laidlaw, executive chairman of Neptune, backed by private equity firms Carlyle Group and CVC Capital Partners, said he saw no time pressure for his company’s IPO.

“Lower returns at $100 a barrel than at $60 raised concerns among capital markets. There is less appetite from generalist investors. We don’t see anything that’s IPO ready yet,” he told Reuters this month.

“Some will consolidate, some will never make it to market, some will take longer. If we wanted to be first, there’s plenty of time still.”

Many of the IPO candidates, including Neptune, were set up in the wake of the 2014 crash by private-equity funds seeking to buy cheap and sell high when the oil price recovers.

But nearly five years on, the going is still tough for the sector.

In the first quarter of 2019, European IPOs slumped to their lowest since the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, as uncertainty over Brexit and the U.S.-China trade dispute left companies not wanting to take their chances.

## UNIQUE STORY

To succeed, companies will have to offer investors something unique, says Jon Clark, regional transaction leader at EY.

“The European oil and gas IPO landscape looks like it will shift from famine to feast and the potential IPO candidates need to think how they will best position themselves,” Clark said.

Wintershall-Dea is the largest producer of the group, aiming to boost its output by around 30% to at least 750,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day by 2023, in a portfolio stretching from Brazil to Europe and Russia and the Middle East.

Chrysaor, backed by Harbour and EIG, is the largest oil and gas producer in the North Sea after acquiring large portfolios from Royal Dutch Shell and ConocoPhillips.

Neptune has assets in a number of regions and is focused on gas, seen as the least-polluting fossil fuel.

In addition to returns, environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues are an ever-growing concern for fund managers and their clients.

Unlike any other time, investors are likely to question a company seeking to list on its role in the transition to a lower carbon economy following the 2015 Paris climate agreement to limit global warming.

“Sentiment in the market is not necessarily as strong as it used to be for oil and gas assets… we’re moving towards a lower carbon economy,” said Les Thomas, chief executive of Ithaca, owned by Israel’s Delek Group, which last month acquired most of Chevron’s North Sea assets for $2 billion.

Greek group Energean was one of a handful of energy companies to list in London in recent years, betting on Israeli gas production and long-term offtake agreements. Its shares have risen over 90% since listing last year.

“Oil price upside is not enough anymore. You have to offer investors at least partial, if not complete, security of a return on their investment regardless of commodity prices,” Energean Chief Executive Mathios Rigas said.

“It’s not enough to say I have this amazing geologist or knowledge of a basin or promise to find oil in frontier areas. To continue investing as an energy company only in oil, from an ESG perspective, is suicidal.”

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# OPEC warns that trade tensions are hurting global oil demand

LONDON (Bloomberg) — OPEC said that international trade tensions are hurting demand for oil, slashing its estimates for consumption earlier in the year and predicting further challenges ahead.

The organization, due to meet in the coming weeks to set production levels for the second half, said demand increased by less than 1 MMbpd in the first quarter after cutting its assessment by more than 20%. The world economy is headed for its weakest growth in a decade, buffeted by a prolonged tariff battle between the U.S. and China.

“Throughout the first half of this year, ongoing global trade tensions have escalated,” resulting in “weaker growth in global oil demand,” the cartel’s Vienna-based secretariat said in its monthly report. “The observed slowdown in the global economy in the first half will be further challenged in the second half.”

Oil prices slumped into a bear market last week, sinking below $60/bbl in London for the first time since January, on concerns that faltering demand would lead to a crude surplus even as the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies keep supply in check. Prices surged 3% today on suspected attacks on oil tankers in the Persian Gulf.

Although OPEC reduced demand estimates for the first quarter, it kept forecasts for 2019 as a whole mostly unchanged and projects that consumption growth will accelerate during the rest of the year. World demand will rise by 1.14 MMbpd, or 1.2%, on average this year, down from an estimate of 1.21 MMbpd in last month’s report.

As a result, the report signaled that if OPEC maintains production at current levels then global markets should tighten significantly during the third quarter, by about 1.3 MMbpd. Output from its 14 members fell by 236,000 bpd to 29.9 MMbpd last month as the U.S. tightened its squeeze on Iranian exports, it said.

Nonetheless, as OPEC and its partners prepare to meet in Vienna, its members appear focused on continuing to restrict supplies.

Saudi Arabian Energy Minister Khalid Al-Falih said in St. Petersburg last week that the organization is aligned on maintaining its output curbs during the rest of 2019, and awaits only a similar commitment from its ally, Russia.

As the booming American shale industry propels U.S. production to new records, United Arab Emirates Energy Minister Suhail Al Mazrouei even indicated that OPEC may also need to constrain supply in 2020. The cartel pumps about 40% of the world’s oil.

Although the policy decision looks straightforward when OPEC and its partners convene, the producers are still struggling with one issue. As the tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran continue to heat up, members are bickering over exactly which date to meet.

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# Higher gas prices, North Field production boost Qatar account surplus: World Bank

Qatar’s current account surplus increased to 8.7% in third quarter of 2018, from less than 4% in 2017 due to higher gas prices and production from the North Field, the country’s biggest gas repository, according to the World Bank.

Qatar, the largest LNG exporter globally, had seen its goods export earnings rose by 25% in 2018, World Bank has said in its recent “Economic Update.”

The country’s public finances have improved, supported by the recovery in energy prices, and Qatar is expected to post a small fiscal surplus in 2018, the first since 2014. A large public investment programme for 2014-2024 has been pared back, with FIFA 2022 projects given priority.

Qatar’s withdrawal from the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) in January 2019, after six decades of membership, has not had a major impact since Qatar was one of the smallest members of the group, making up less than 2% of Opec’s total oil production, World Bank noted.

The World Bank said Qatar’s “outlook remains positive” with growth expected to rise to 3.4% by 2021 driven by higher service sector growth as the FIFA World Cup draws nearer. In addition, higher infrastructure spending on the Qatar National Vision 2030 projects aimed at diversifying the economy should help offset falling investment spending on FIFA projects.

The hydrocarbon sector growth is also expected to pick up as the Barzan natural gas facility comes online in 2020, and as the expansion of the North Field gas projects is completed by 2024. Monetary policy is expected to gradually tighten as the Qatar Central Bank resumes raising interest rates to restore the spread versus US policy rates, and to attract FX inflows into the banking system. Public finances are expected to remain in small surplus, supported by recent tax reforms and the introduction of a VAT over the medium term, the World Bank said.

A recovery in imports, driven by capital goods related to infrastructure spending, should keep the current account surplus in single-digits (in contrast to surpluses of over 30% prior to 2014).

Qatar’s economy has largely overcome the constraints posed by the “continuing diplomatic rift” with GCC (Gulf Co-operation Council) neighbours, the report noted.

“Nevertheless, a resolution of this situation would help boost investor confidence. Key external risks include risks of volatility in global energy prices, regional instability risks, and global financial volatility that affects capital flows and costs of funding although these are mitigated by the return to fiscal and current account surpluses,” the World Bank said.