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Commentary

## EU–Russia Energy Relations, EU Energy Integration, and Energy Security: the State of the Art and a Roadmap for Future Research

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## Abstract

The 2014 Ukrainian crisis has aggravated numerous gas-related disputes and highlighted the overall politicisation of energy issues between the EU and Russia. These tensions have unveiled a need to address the growing disarray in EU–Russia energy relations, to assess the role of EU integration in multilateral energy processes, and to classify various understandings of energy security across Europe. This commentary provides an overview of how scholarship has tackled these issues so far. Discussing the contributions and shortcomings of these studies, it offers a roadmap for a future research agenda.

## Keywords

Energy security; European Union; Russia; energy relations; EU energy integration

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Repeated gas disputes between Russia and Ukraine and the increasing politicisation of energy issues in Europe have enhanced the scholarship on EU–Russia energy relations and various facets of EU energy integration. Numerous academic studies have addressed the issues of energy security, multilateral energy governance, and the intricacies of EU–Russia energy rapprochement, however, few comprehensive literature reviews on the topic have been provided so far. The overview by Güllner (2008) of the scholarship on energy security with a particular focus on Russia is a rare example of a single review in the field.

A systematisation of studies is an indispensable step towards a clearer and more coherent research agenda for studying EU energy ‘actorness’ — both external, in relations with major energy suppliers, especially Russia, and internal, in the creation of the EU internal energy market. Such a review also highlights alternatives for pipeline politics and the concept of energy weaponry, strands that are already experiencing a resurgence in academic and policy-orientated studies in light of the 2014 Ukrainian crisis. Acknowledging the serious implications of this conflict for energy security in Europe and for EU–Russia relations in general, this review, however, warns against trapping energy issues in EU–Russia relations and the EU energy integration processes into traditional pipeline politics and a self-fulfilling securitisation. Some scholars have already pointed out that ‘a substantial number of politicians and foreign policy makers seem to be stuck in a Cold War paradigm’ and have highlighted mismatches between policy proposals during the Ukrainian crisis and gas market fundamentals (Goldthau & Boersma 2014).

This review article traces back how scholarship has addressed EU integration developments and their implications for bilateral and multilateral energy institutionalisation in Europe. It also distills debates about the nature of EU–Russia energy relations, the EU international energy ‘actorness’, and a broader role of energy resources in international relations. Analysing gaps in the literature, this commentary drafts a pilot roadmap for future research that encourages the study of the energy aspects of EU–Russia relations and EU integration to be developed in a more coherent and comprehensive fashion.

## EU–RUSSIA ENERGY RELATIONS: STATE OF THE ART

A revival of energy issues in the research agenda of International Relations (IR) and European Studies became apparent at the beginning of the 2000s. First, globally changing patterns in energy demand and the emerging retreat from the neoliberal economic agenda of the 1990s towards greater resource nationalism required a thorough assessment. Second, domestic developments in the EU and Russian hydrocarbon sectors during the 2000s transformed energy into a highly politicised aspect of both EU–Russia relations and EU internal policy-making. Comparatively, during the 1990s, both the multilateral process of the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT) and negotiations of the EU–Russia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) had been generally consistent with the EU-backed liberal framework, and the overall *modus operandi* of the gas trade in Europe remained largely undisputed.

Institutional differences between the EU and Russian gas market structures began to emerge in the 2000s: in Russia, reinforcement of state control became particularly apparent in the hydrocarbon sector; and in the EU, the Anglo-Saxon neoliberal model for the vertically-integrated network industries of gas and electricity, an agenda rather new to continental Europe, gradually developed into a new doctrine for the EU Internal Energy Market. The differences were further aggravated with the intricate gas crises between Ukraine and Russia in 2006 and 2009, and with the 2004 enlargement of the EU. The latter made the historical legacies of the Central and Eastern European gas markets part of the EU political and regulatory landscape and, as a result, an issue for inevitable deliberations with Russia. A complex combination of these events fuelled an unprecedented politicisation of energy, especially gas-related, issues in Europe. Since then, scholarship has consistently engaged in debates about the *momentum* for an EU common energy policy and the emergence of its strategic dimension, and about geopolitically-motivated alterations in Russia's energy policy-making.

So far, academic debates have predominantly focused on three broad areas of analysis. *First*, scholars have been interested in whether and to what extent the EU and Russia have managed to institutionalise their relations, approximate or harmonise their regulatory frameworks and create a common energy space, arguably well-needed under high interdependence (Hadfield 2008; Leal-Arcas 2009; Padgett 2011; Romanova 2012, 2014). Issues under discussion have included inter alia the EU–Russia Energy Dialogue (Romanova 2008); the intricacies of EU–Russia energy interdependence (Proedrou 2007); and the participation of the EU and Russia in multilateral initiatives (Hadfield & Amkhan-Bayno 2013).

Confirmed by most scholars, increasing inconsistencies in EU–Russia gas relations have been, however, attributed to various explanations. Scholarship has followed the general trend in IR to explain energy conflicts as *bellum omnium contra omnes* as a result of the unequal allocation of resources across the world and competition for them between energy producers and consumers (Umbach 2011). Some studies have consistently treated the politicisation of EU–Russia gas relations as a result of Russia's deviation from the liberal model of energy markets towards progressive resource nationalism (Newnham 2011). Moreover, ideational factors as explanatory variables have also acquired prominent positions in academic debates: a lack of trust between the EU and Russia (Ziegler 2013), their different visions of energy cooperation (Casier 2011), normative orders (Haukkala 2014), ideas about the organisation of energy markets (Kuzemko 2014), and energy discourses (Kratochvíl & Tichý 2013) have been argued to explain the deterioration of EU–Russia relations.

The *second* aspect scholarship has sought to address is the impact of EU integration on its relations with other actors, and, conversely, the impact of external events on the EU integration process. The deepening of EU gas markets' integration and *communitarisation* of national energy policies have

been largely studied in line with the supranational–intergovernmental debates (Birchfield & Duffield 2011; Eikeland 2011; Matlár 1997), with an emphasis on various approaches of member states towards Russia (Bozhilova & Hashimoto 2010; Schmidt-Felzmann 2011; Youngs 2009: 79-99). Recently, new insights into the analysis of ‘a work-in-progress’ in the EU internal gas market have emerged from International Political Economy (Fernandez & Palazuelos 2014), governance studies (Andersen & Sitter 2015), and the English School (Aalto & Korkmaz Temel 2014). The impact of EU integration on its neighbourhood has been majorly assessed as a (neofunctionalist) rule expansion within EU external governance (Prange-Gstöhl 2009; Renner 2009) and as a broader acceptance of EU energy acquis by other countries (Belyi 2012).

*Third*, scholarship has actively engaged in debates about energy security, with a particular focus on its political aspects (Bilgin 2009; Tekin & Williams 2009). Debates have been enriched by studies about the increasing securitisation of both EU–Russia energy relations (Belyi 2003; Kirchner & Berk 2010) and EU energy policies (Maltby 2013; Natorski & Herranz Surrallés 2008). Russia’s role in (pan-) European energy security has been studied predominately from the realist-driven perspective (Dellecker & Gomart 2011; Feklyunina 2012; Perovic 2009). Studies about Russia’s energy policy as a tool for coercion (Newnham 2011; Orttung & Overland 2011; Smith Stegen 2011) have coupled with analysis of domestic non-transparent relations between the Russian government and Gazprom (Bilgin 2011; Heinrich 2008; Kazantsev 2010).

### CONTRIBUTION AND SHORTCOMINGS

The studies presented have touched upon the role of energy resources in the limitations of multilateral energy governance and have contributed to the research about EU international energy actorhood and the role of energy in the EU integration process.

First, the most noteworthy contribution has arguably been provided to debates about the nature of the EU and Russia as energy actors. The differentiation between the EU and Russia (Finon & Locatelli 2008) has been majorly based on the seminal conceptualisation of energy actors as either the proponents of ‘Markets and Institutions’ or those of ‘Regions and Empire’ respectively by Correlje and van der Linde (2006). Yet, this straightforward understanding of energy resources either ‘as a commodity to be traded openly on world markets or as a resource to be projected politically for foreign policy power’ (Keating, Kuzemko, Belyi & Goldthau 2012: 1) has inevitably overlooked complex interrelationships between profit-based and political calculations in the hydrocarbon sector in both energy producing and importing countries. Recently, IPE research has attempted to fill this gap, providing a comprehensive overview of governance arrangements in the hydrocarbon sectors of both energy producers and consumers (Belyi & Talus 2015; Fernandez & Palazuelos 2014; Keating, Kuzemko, Belyi & Goldthau 2012).

Moreover, discussion of EU energy actorhood has transformed into a kind of sterile debate about a sharp division between norms and interests, explicitly or implicitly assumed — the thesis largely consistent with variations of the Normative Power Europe concept (Manners 2002). Conceptualisation of the EU as a market actor has remained rather ambiguous: it has often been left unclear whether a ‘market’ actor is one that guides its policy choices exclusively by the *laissez-faire* principle or whether it is one that promotes a certain model of the gas market, based on a complex web of principles of market liberalisation and the gradual reallocation of a regulatory framework from the national to the supranational level (see Damro 2015 on Market Power Europe). Moreover, the normativity of EU actorhood has been increasingly questioned as a result of numerous concessions of democracy and human rights issues by the EU in relations with energy suppliers and

by the growing importance of the security dimension of the EU internal energy market (Youngs 2009).

So far, scholarship has largely neglected or addressed insufficiently institutional developments in both the EU's and Russia's hydrocarbon sectors, staying in the normative traps of either assuming a benign nature of the EU 'market' model or attributing the limited institutionalisation of EU–Russia relations to structural divergence between the interests of energy producers and consumers. Some studies, however, have made initial steps towards explaining failures in energy governance by studying domestic institutional developments in the EU and Russia (Belyi 2014; Boussema & Locatelli 2013) and discussing domestic institutional factors in Russia's external energy policy-making (Balmaceda 2011), as well as in the policies of post-Soviet states (Balmaceda 2008).

The second essential contribution has been provided to the scholarship on power in energy relations. Flourishing especially after the 2006 Russia–Ukraine gas dispute, studies about EU supply diversification and the use of energy as a foreign policy tool by Russia have explored in detail how Energy Power, the use of energy resources by one actor to force another actor to consent, can be applied to the case of EU–Russia relations. First, some studies have analysed how states viewed as unitary actors can promote their interests by means of energy resources (Orban 2008). The major flaw of this strand remains the tendency to equate power and resource ownership in a rather straightforward manner, assuming that resource-rich states have energy power by default. Second, others have advocated a more complex approach to study relations between energy-rich and energy-poor states. The major focus of these studies has become analysis of state, corporate and 'private interests-within-the corporation', an interplay of which has been argued to affect the relations of Russia with post-Soviet states (Balmaceda 2006, 2008). Constraints upon Russia as 'an energy political actor' have also been addressed in a framework on the basis of the social structurationist approaches (Aalto, Dusseault, Kennedy & Kivinen 2014).

Third, securitisation studies have contributed to the literature on energy security, having examined how energy issues are being framed as a threat and a matter of security in the EU-wide agenda, internalising tensions with Russia and reflecting the political entrepreneurship of the European Commission. At the same time, most studies have focused on the securitisation process instead of addressing the question of to what extent the securitised policy issues actually represent a threat.

#### **AFTER THE 2014 UKRAINIAN CRISIS: LOOKING FOR NEW ROADMAPS**

The 2014 Ukrainian crisis represents a crucial test for EU–Russia relations and EU international actorness. It has already invoked further enhancement of EU integration in energy—it is yet unclear whether and how the EU Energy Union (the new concept of the energy transition proposed by the European Commission in late 2014) is consistent with the model of the liberalised gas market, but this European Commission initiative surely represents a serious step towards 'speaking with a single voice' in energy and might lead to further securitisation of EU energy policies.

These shifts require a reassessment of the norms versus interests debates about EU energy actorness by borrowing from regulatory studies the analysis of how the EU gas market model might be developing (Ascari 2013; Glachant 2013). This will facilitate a bridging of debates about the EU as a market actor and a security-driven path of EU external energy policies. A more critical assessment of perceived and real threats to EU energy security is also welcome in light of ongoing large-scale spending on infrastructure projects within the EU — issues that have become something of a self-fulfilling prophecy in the energy strand of securitisation studies.

In relations of the EU with Russia and other suppliers in the European gas market, debates should be enriched with analysis of the role of domestic institutional factors in energy conflicts. The direction of bridging energy economics, energy law and IR, chosen by Aalto and Talus (2014) in the special issue of *Energy Policy*, is a welcome step and worth following up. Analysis of domestic institutions would allow for demonstrating how domestic institutional changes can bring certain inconsistencies in relations between states and overcome the deterministic antagonism between energy producers and consumers favoured by IR so far.

A discussion of institutional changes in the EU and Russian hydrocarbon sectors would also shed additional light on issues relating to energy security. Given a low formalisation of EU–Russia gas relations and the informal nature of gas trade international institutions, energy security also depends on common rules of the game and a shared understanding of what constitutes the modus operandi in energy markets. Triggered by domestic shifts in institutional structures of hydrocarbon sectors, these rules are also getting increasingly reassessed in negotiations between the European Commission and Russia.

There is also a need for a better grounded, both analytically and methodologically, concept of energy power. An actor's (self-) perceptions of being an energy power or being threatened by an energy power and the actual outcome of energy power should be clearly differentiated. Debates about power aspects in energy can also be expanded beyond the (neo-) realist framework of power as resource ownership and control over infrastructure and enriched with interdisciplinary discussions about power (Forsberg 2011). Thus, debates about energy power can be enriched by looking at the ability to set rules and legitimise the sense of appropriateness in energy markets. This research path can be enhanced with the analysis of paradigmatic shifts in the governance of international gas markets, including debates about an appropriate gas pricing mechanism. This will allow for the expansion of the framework for analysis of EU–Russia relations, as well as shedding additional light on EU energy actorness both in Europe and across the world.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Scholarship has addressed several main issues in the field of EU–Russia energy relations and EU energy integration. First, some studies have emphasised pipeline politics in explaining EU–Russia energy relations. They have also attributed high importance to diversification strategies in ensuring EU energy security. Second, EU and Russia's separate energy actornesses have been dichotomised: EU market liberalisation was often assumed to be power-free and a priori benign, and the ability of Russia to use energy resources for political goals was viewed as a *fait accompli*. Third, many studies have focused on ideational factors as explanatory variables for dynamics of EU–Russia relations and the EU integration process. Energy security issues have been majorly addressed from the positions of securitisation and pipeline politics. Empirically, energy security, EU relations with Russia and the dynamics of the Internal Energy Market have constituted three major areas of research inquiries, which have been complemented with sporadic assessments of multilateral energy governance in Europe within the Energy Charter process.

This commentary on the state of the literature is a first step towards a serious theoretical and methodological reassessment of the field. It argues for looking into the detail of EU energy actorness, an interplay between domestic institutional factors and international energy cooperation, and the power aspects of energy relations.

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