

Review - Russia's Energy Policies

Written by Artur Tranzola Santos

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ARTUR TRANZOLA SANTOS, DEC 26 2012

Russia's Energy Policies: National, Interregional, and Global Levels

Edited By: Pami Aalto

Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2012.

It is no

wonder energy policy occupies an avowed role within the scope of both foreign and national plans of the Russian government. Nevertheless, this seemingly obvious, clear affirmative contains several arguments for additional observations and studies which must be considered in the agenda of any self-respecting scholar of Russian policy formation. André Pertuzio once said “*un pays ne se développe qu'en consommant de l'énergie et c'est cette consommation qui indique son niveau de développement*”[1]; as the only energy self-sufficient great power in the world and often deemed as an energy superpower, Russia may have taken Pertuzio's observation as a way of life.

Russia's Energy Policies contributes to the discussion concerning the capabilities and possibilities of this great

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regional and global power, with contributions from some of the main international scholars of this issue, such as: Pami Aalto – the main author – Margarita Balmaceda, David Dusseault, Markku Kivinen, Nina Poussenkova, Hanna Smith and Michael Kennedy. Despite possible differences concerning the methods and styles of the authors involved, this book concentrates the arguments and explanations around one specific scheme. The central thrust of the book is focused on explicating the prominent driving forces of Russian energy policy at the national, interregional and global levels.

With the argument that “[e]xcessively actor-centric conceptualizations of energy policy formation may take the form of either simplistic rationalism or excessive voluntarism” (p. 29), the authors propose an explanatory scheme with four main macro variables which they call “structural dimensions.” These dimensions are the resource geographic, the financial, the institutional and the ecological. What is more, the enabling and constraining social/material factors are included in the overall analysis, taking into account the influence of events, which they conceptualize as “sequences of occurrences that may result in the reformulation of energy policies” (p. 36).

The book is divided into four main parts. The first discusses the methodology and the importance of this study, the second deals with the national level of Russian energy policies, the third embraces the interregional context – probably the main point of interest for International Relations students, given the projection upon Europe and Asia – the fourth and last part focuses on the global level with considerations about the environment, security and globalization. The multiplicity of actors, variables and fields of action which composes this multi-faceted work is not just another analytical instrument to adapt to different publics that risk overlapping previous studies; but instead, the authors aim at providing the best and most complete insights in the energy policy formation.

National, Interregional and Global Levels

Considering each of the levels analyzed in the book, the national one emphasizes the multiplicity of interests and actors in the energy policy formation, ranging from state bureaucrats, through oligarchs, down to individual businessmen. These issues have come to the fore of the debate especially after the arrival of Putin and seem to be far from a conclusion. The need – and possibilities – of an expansion to the East is also in vogue in governmental debates and plans, and this first part deals with this question accordingly, focusing on the major projects located in this new/possible El Dorado of the Russian energy sector. The end of this first part analyses the ecological constraints of the energy sector in Russia, as well as the enabling and constraining forces of the four dimensions aforementioned.

The third part – the interregional level – starts with one of the most controversial issues of the current European/Russian energy debates, a specific discussion on the Nord Stream and the concepts of “security of demand”, “business or strategic frame” and other considerations about the goals and actions of Russia in maintaining the position of a great oil and gas exporter and the role of Europe as a major – and dependent – importer. Another noteworthy issue on this score is the historical analysis of the relations between Russia and two of the most important transit states in Europe, Belarus and Ukraine. Despite the misunderstandings and political imbroglios involving these countries, which have been discussed at length since 2005, there is a mutual need of agreement and a strong, strategic calculus that keep them partners and sometimes more. The last chapter of this third part aims at assessing the potentials of an expansion eastwards of a strong Russian energy policy for the region. The focus is not only on the national realm but also on the willingness of China, Korea and Japan to diversify their imports and to invest in the production and development of new exploration spots in Russia.

The section of global level analysis deals with the internationalization of Russian oil companies. With the need for more investments, the changes in the characteristics of the demand and the capabilities of the supply, both the government and the private sector have been looking into new business and strategic options throughout the world, albeit they are facing some obstacles – even in their own institutional ground. Nina Poussenkova compares the expansion pace during the Soviet era, the 1990s – when Russia was “fighting for survival in the face of severe difficulties ensuing from developments on the financial dimension” (p. 191) – and the 2000s, the golden period of this internationalization. The second chapter of this part presents some the main global concerns on the relation between energy security and climate change and the role of Russia in this context. It is important to bear in mind that the

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prominence of fossil fuel in the Russian energy matrix may hinder the development of this sector, insofar as ecological concerns gain new grounds in the current debate. To sum up the work, editor Pami Aalto summarizes the conclusion of the other chapters of the book and stresses the possibilities of co-existence of these multi-dimensional variables.

The overall goal of this book may be to present an undoubtedly important approach to understanding the driving forces of the formation of Russian energy policy, however it is also a call for scholars to delve even more into this complex scenario. As the author herself posits “[t]he relatively complex model which we used to give direction to our analyses in this book also requires complex research designs and ambitious field research programs in order to fully exploit its potential and to transfer the analytical benefits to studies of practical relevance” (p. 237). If one intends to follow these steps *Russia's Energy Policies* may not be just a recommendation, but a roadmap for the way to move forward.

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[1] “A nation will only develop consuming energy and it is the exactly capacity of consumption which will indicate its level of development.”

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