

Book Review

Aalto, Pami (ed.)
The EU-Russian Energy Dialogue: Europe's Future
Energy Security

Aldershot: Ashgate (2008)

Jack Sharples

University of Glasgow, UK

In their examination of the EU-Russian energy dialogue, Aalto *et al.* approach the issue from a specific point of view – the prospects for establishing a Pan-European energy policy. In doing so, the book may be divided into three sections. The first section begins with an overview of the EU-Russian energy dialogue, and how narratives may be used to interpret this dialogue from the perspective of both the EU and Russia. Chapters Four to Eight then offer a series of case studies, which illustrate different obstacles to the creation of a pan-European energy policy. In the final section, Aalto's concluding chapter re-considers the prospects for a pan-European energy policy in light of these obstacles.

The first section of this book begins with Aalto and Westphal's Introduction, which discusses European energy vulnerability and the need for a pan-European energy policy. In doing so, Aalto and Westphal identify six different approaches to analysing energy policy. In Chapter Two Aalto discusses the potential impact of the EU-Russia energy dialogue on the future of European integration, while in Chapter Three Morozov considers the impact of the energy dialogue on the future of Russia. Both Aalto and Morozov make use of narrative approaches to conduct their analyses; specifically the economic co-operation and the politico-normative peace project narratives.

The second section of the book begins with Chapter Four, as Romanova examines the EU's 'Northern Dimension' as a case study for regional interaction between the EU and Russia. Key themes in this chapter are the attempts (by both the EU and Russia) to 'de-couple' the technical aspect of energy co-operation from the political issues current in the EU-Russian relationship, and the attempts by the EU to extend the norms of the acquis communautaire to Russia, which is not in Russia's national interest, even if it is in the interest of the EU-Russian energy relationship. In Chapter Five Westphal considers Germany's bilateral relationship with Russia, and concludes that although this relationship is beneficial to Germany, it has somewhat undermined the common EU approach. In Chapter Six Aalto and Tynkkynen discuss the Nordic countries as a regional grouping, and conclude that the heterogeneity of interests among the Nordic states serves to illustrate the conflicts of interest which obstruct the creation of consensual energy policy at the broader European level. In Chapter Seven Berg explores the role of the Baltic States in the EU-Russia energy link. Berg concludes that despite differences in terms of structural factors, political strategies, and domestic actors, geographical location will continue to determine the role of the Baltic States as energy transit states between the rest of Europe and Russia. In Chapter Eight Tkachenko considers the Russian aspect of the EU-Russia energy, and concludes that the state will remain the supreme actor in the Russian energy sector, and that while the Russian President and Government do not oppose the presence of foreign capital and investment, this capital and investment will only be welcome if it does not entail any contradiction of Russia's national interests.



Finally, Aalto takes the issues discussed in chapters Four to Eight, and reduces them to four abstract concepts, which are then discussed as obstacles to the construction of a pan-European energy policy. Aalto concludes that while the current approach to the EU-Russia energy dialogue is yielding piecemeal progress, continuation on this course will leave fundamental questions unanswered, and that this could jeopardise the long-term energy relationship. Aalto therefore suggests a different policy option, which is to greatly increase the range of actors in the EU-Russia energy dialogue. Aalto argues that, while this would complicate the facilitation of short-term compromises, the varying interests of EU member states would be better served and the linkages between strategic and regional levels would be intensified. As such, EU member states would have greater incentives to integrate around a pan-European energy policy, while Russia would benefit from greater levels of interaction in terms of technology transfer, investment and modernisation.

This book offers an interesting collection of case studies which serve to illustrate the various difficulties faced in the construction of a pan-European energy policy towards Russia. However, while the difficulty of editing and constructing a study composed of a series of contributions by different authors is appreciated, this book is somewhat let down by its lack of coherence. Taken as a whole, this volume simply feels disjointed. The six approaches to analysing energy policy offered in Chapter One, and the narrative approaches utilised in Chapters Two and Three are rarely, if at all, present in the subsequent chapters of the second section. The result is that references to these approaches and narratives at the end of the book leave the conclusion also feeling disconnected from the case study chapters. Finally, although this book claims to focus on Northern Europe as the most promising 'test case' for a pan-European energy policy, the extent to which the lessons learned from this test case may be applied to other regions of Europe is given rather scant treatment in the concluding chapter of this book. As such, the declared aim of the book (to discuss the prospects for a pan-European energy policy) remains somewhat unrelated to its actual content (the development of the EU-Russia energy dialogue in Northern Europe). If the aim of this volume had been to use Northern Europe as a case study for the future prospects of the EU-Russia energy dialogue, then perhaps this volume may have been more intellectually coherent. On a minor note, this book would also perhaps have benefited from a proofreading by a native English speaker, as the language was at times unclear. To summarise, while the case studies in this book provide interesting considerations of particular aspects of the EU-Russia energy dialogue, the gathering of these case studies into a single edited volume, and the additional analytical considerations offered at the beginning and end of this book, unfortunately add little intellectual value to them.

James D.J. Brown

University of Aberdeen, UK

In contrast to the wide-ranging analysis of Haghighi (2007), Pami Aalto's edited volume focuses more narrowly on Europe's energy relationship with its most important supplier, Russia, and specifically on the primary institution created to manage it – the EU-Russian Energy Dialogue. The book describes this mechanism in detail and employs international relations theory to analyse it. Northern European case studies are then utilised to test the authors' hypotheses.

The common epistemological current flowing through this book is constructivism and, as seems appropriate for a book about dialogue, the editor stresses narrative analysis. According to this theory, texts and social interaction are important influences on policy formation due to the key role that language plays in constructing actors' distinct realities. Specifically, contending narratives, in combination with concepts of identity and otherness, are viewed as significant influences on the development of European energy policy. Intra-EU

narratives of integration are identified, namely the economic co-operation narrative and the politico-normative peace project narrative. Additionally, as the book progresses, this narrative approach is used to invite comparison between the EU and Russian approaches to energy trade. Whilst EU institutions consistently employ language emphasising integration, dialogue, and the mutual benefits of co-operation, Russia interprets the relationship as a zero-sum game in which consumer and supplier compete for ascendancy. Other than constructivism, harmony between the chapters is also attempted via a common refrain about energy security's interdisciplinarity. Borrowing from neo-functionalism, it is suggested that one form of co-operation is liable to spill-over into other policy areas, thus encouraging integration to progress organically. What is more, there is a general emphasis on political sociology and bureaucratic theories of policymaking, which prioritise non-state actors.

In addition to the introduction stressing these core themes, this volume consists of eight chapters. The contributors are from several different countries and pleasingly include Russian academics. In the first three of these chapters, Pami Aalto, Viatcheslav Morozov, and Tatiana Romanova deal in more detail with narratives, Russia's future in Europe, and different levels of analysis (regional versus strategic). Then follow a series of chapters which focus more specifically on one country or regional grouping. Eiki Berg's offers a piece on the Baltic States that usefully highlights distinctions in the energy policies of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Meanwhile, Pami Aalto and Nina Tynkkynen evaluate Nordic countries' influence on the Dialogue, with particular attention to environmental issues and the contrasting positions of Norway and Finland.

The better case studies, however, are on Germany and Russia. In the first of these, Kirsten Westphal competently charts the evolution of German energy policy and evaluates its impact upon EU-Russian relations. The Schröder and Merkel administrations are compared and the controversial Nord Steam pipeline discussed. This chapter also draws attention to the prominence of interest-driven personal contacts and the protection that the Federal Government accords to Germany's largest energy companies. In so doing, Westphal goes at least some way towards addressing the key question of why EU states continue to prioritise bilateral energy relations and remain reluctant to pool sovereignty.

Secondly, Stanislav Tkachenko impressively catalogues the key actors involved in the formation and execution of Russian energy policy. Although undoubtedly more cohesive than the EU, it is too often assumed that Russia functions monolithically. Tkachenko instead takes the view that Russian policy is the product of competition and intrigue amongst a broad range of groups, including the presidential administration, government and ministries, parliament, regions, oil and gas companies, financial institutions, business organisations, and foreign energy companies. This will prove a precious resource for researchers studying the intricate inner-workings of the Russian political system. Curiously, however, Tkachenko makes no mention of Federal Service for the Oversight of Natural Resources (and its activist deputy head, Oleg Mitvol), which has been so central to the state's campaign to reclaim strategic energy assets from foreign ownership.

Collectively, the book's chapters provide a good account of the overall characteristics of the EU-Russian Energy Dialogue. However, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this Dialogue (and thus the subject matter of this book) is of extremely limited importance. Although the contributors enthusiastically point to various working groups and a few localised schemes to reduce Russian energy inefficient and improve environmental standards, this co-operation is very low-level and shows no signs of spilling-over into anything more significant. Indeed, when it comes to major issues and crisis prevention, the mechanism appears entirely powerless. This is reflected by the fact that, since the launch of the Dialogue in October 2000, relations between the EU and Russia have seriously deteriorated.

In addition to doubts about the impact of the Dialogue, there is also a real question mark about how much is usefully gained from the book's application of constructivism to the field

of energy security. There is a strong sense that a favoured theory of European integration has simply been foisted upon EU-Russian energy relations with little consideration of how much it actually has to contribute to the field. No doubt the EU and Russia do employ contrasting narratives, but such factors are extremely marginal when compared with material determinants of actors' behaviour. In fairness, material constraints imposed on the EU by its energy weakness are occasionally mentioned, yet they remain seriously underestimated.

Further weaknesses are derived from the fact that this is a book written by EU enthusiasts and not energy experts. To begin with, the editor's uncritically pro-EU tone and casual dismissal of the Union's detractors can be jarring. More seriously, however, unfamiliarity with energy issues has led to some considerable oversights. For example, the post-2001 rise in oil prices is exclusively attributed to supply-side constraints, while absolutely no mention is made of developing states' burgeoning energy demand or the weakness of the dollar (p. 1). More embarrassingly, the editor also confuses carbon dioxide and hydrocarbons (p. 25). Indeed, this book is generally let down by errors. Unlike the above, the majority of these are spelling mistakes or relate to the inarticulate use of English. Although one would usually be inclined to ignore such peccadilloes, on this occasion it is not possible due to their disruptive abundance.

In summary, this book is fine when dealing with technical elements of the EU-Russian Energy Dialogue, but much weaker at coherently addressing the big questions of European energy security. In this regard, it is rather like the EU itself. This volume will therefore be of use to those who wish to understand the Dialogue's institutional structure or who have a specialist interest in northern Europe. Readers looking for a book that successfully tackles the major issues of EU-Russian energy trade are advised to look elsewhere. Ultimately, the high initial promise of Aalto's book is not fulfilled.
