



# An Avoidable Dependency? Russian Gas and German Complacency in the History of East–West Energy Relations

Martin Lutz 

Received: 6 March 2024 / Accepted: 21 March 2024  
© The Author(s) 2024

**Abstract** How dependent were Germany and the European Union as a whole on Russian gas, and what lines can be traced in the historical development of energy relations? These questions are at the heart of the six books discussed, all of which were written in the context of Russia’s increasing aggression against Ukraine. All books examine the dependency in the energy sector, both for the exporting Soviet Union and Russia as well as for the importing countries. The essay argues that conceptualisations of dependency, underlying economic interests, and transnational interdependencies require further research.

**Keywords** Soviet Union · Ukraine · Energy Humanities · Energiewende · Global trade · Resources

---

✉ Martin Lutz  
Universität Bielefeld, Bielefeld, Germany  
E-Mail: [martin.lutz@uni-bielefeld.de](mailto:martin.lutz@uni-bielefeld.de)

## Eine vermeidbare Abhängigkeit? Russisches Gas und deutsche Nachlässigkeit in der Geschichte der ost-westlichen Energiebeziehungen

**Zusammenfassung** Wie abhängig waren Deutschland und die Europäische Union insgesamt von russischem Gas und welche Linien lassen sich in der historischen Entwicklung der Energiebeziehungen nachzeichnen? Diese Fragen stehen im Zentrum der sechs besprochenen Bücher, die alle im Kontext der zunehmenden auch militärischen Aggression Russlands gegen die Ukraine seit 2014 und gegen andere osteuropäische Länder entstanden sind. Die Werke bilden ein breites Spektrum geschichts- und sozialwissenschaftlicher Forschung sowie an eine breitere Öffentlichkeit gerichtete Literatur ab. Ihnen gemeinsam ist die Auseinandersetzung mit Abhängigkeit im Energiesektor, sowohl für die exportierende Sowjetunion beziehungsweise Russland als auch für die importierenden Länder. Der Essay bespricht thematisch gegliedert zwei chronologisch breit angelegte Überblicksdarstellungen, zwei eingegrenzte Detailstudien und zwei Publikumstitel. In der abschließenden Bewertung bindet die Besprechung an das Forschungsfeld der *energy history* beziehungsweise *energy humanities* an. Es wird argumentiert, dass Konzeptionalisierungen von Abhängigkeit, zugrundeliegenden ökonomischen Interessen und transnationalen Verflechtungen weitergehende Forschungen erfordern. Insbesondere eine engere Verzahnung geisteswissenschaftlicher Forschung mit den sozialwissenschaftlichen *energy studies* könnte das Feld enorm bereichern.

**Schlüsselwörter** Sowjetunion · Ukraine · Energy Humanities · Energiewende · Globaler Handel · Resources

### 1 Introduction

The Russian attack on Ukraine on 24 February 2022 spread fear in Europe: fear of cold winters, rising energy bills, and empty gas storage facilities.<sup>1</sup> It caused a heated public debate on responsibilities and culprits of European energy dependency on Vladimir Putin's autocratic and aggressive regime. In the social sciences and historiography, the war accelerated research output focusing on the roots and mechanisms of Russia's hold on European energy security. This essay discusses six books that address the topic from different angles. Two historical analyses by Dunja Krempin and Jeronim Perović, respectively, look at the long-term evolution of the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia as an energy supplier, drawing on a wealth of archival sources. Thane Gustafson and Margarita M. Balmaceda, two political scientists, focus on Russia's position in the political economy of European energy markets. Finally, journalists Reinhard Bingener and Markus Wehner as well as economist Claudia Kemfert address the specific role of Germany in the expansion of energy flows from Russia from the 1990s onwards.

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Rüdiger Bergien, Robert Kindler, Volker Köhler, and the NPL editorial team for their valuable suggestions.

A common thread runs through all publications: Each one was written in the face of the dramatically deteriorating political climate after Russia's military aggression in Ukraine since 2014. By then, Russia had assumed a status of primary energy supplier to many European countries: How did we get there? How did Russia inherit such a prominent role as a natural gas supplier from the Cold War, expand it in the post-Soviet era, and eventually utilise it as an effective instrument to pursue political goals in its expansionist strategy?

The books offer deep insights. They also are largely congruent in their overall interpretations, stressing the geopolitical role of Russia's gas and Europe's dependence on it. Germany emerges as the main culprit in enabling the Soviet/Russian hold on gas supplies. At the same time, the books take on different research agendas, are written by authors from different disciplines, and are intended for different audiences. As such, they have different strengths.

This essay first discusses two long-term analyses, "Rohstoffmacht Russland. Eine globale Energiegeschichte" from 2022 by historian Jeronim Perović,<sup>2</sup> and political scientist Thane Gustafson's "The Bridge. Natural Gas in a Redivided Europe" from 2020.<sup>3</sup> Both books cover the twentieth century up to the present. The second part of this essay is dedicated to two books that focus more narrowly on the Soviet and Russian perspective. Historian Dunja Krempin's "Die sibirische Wucht. Der Aufstieg der Sowjetunion zur globalen Gasmacht, 1964–1982" from 2020 reconstructs the early phase of the Soviet Union assuming a dominant position in the global gas supply.<sup>4</sup> Political scientist's Margarita M. Balmaceda's "Russian Energy Chains. The Remaking of Technopolitics from Siberia to Ukraine to the European Union" from 2021 is concerned with post-Soviet Russia's strategy in using energy as a political tool in its foreign policy.<sup>5</sup> Finally, two books for a wider public stress Germany's role in enabling Putin's Russia to strengthen its hold on European energy markets in the recent past. In "Die Moskau-Connection. Das Schröder-Netzwerk und Deutschlands Weg in die Abhängigkeit", journalists Reinhard Bingener and Markus Wehner focus on Gerhard Schröder's network of fellow Social Democratic Party (SPD) politicians and business leaders.<sup>6</sup> Economist expert Claudia Kemfert places Russian–German gas deals in the wider context of climate policy and the transition to a carbon-free economy (*Energiewende*). In "Schockwellen. Letzte Chance für sichere Energien und Frieden", Kemfert turns to energy as a weapon and to the role of science in securing both energy security and peace for the world in the remaining years of the twenty-first century.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Perović, Jeronim: *Rohstoffmacht Russland. Eine globale Energiegeschichte*, Böhlau, Köln et al. 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Gustafson, Thane: *The Bridge. Natural Gas in a Redivided Europe*, Harvard UP, Cambridge, MA/London 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Krempin, Dunja: *Die sibirische Wucht. Der Aufstieg der Sowjetunion zur globalen Gasmacht, 1964–1982*, Böhlau, Köln et al. 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Balmaceda, Margarita M.: *Russian Energy Chains. The Remaking of Technopolitics from Siberia to Ukraine to the European Union*, Columbia UP, New York 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Bingener, Reinhard/Wehner, Markus: *Die Moskau-Connection. Das Schröder-Netzwerk und Deutschlands Weg in die Abhängigkeit*, Beck, München 2023.

<sup>7</sup> Kemfert, Claudia: *Schockwellen. Letzte Chance für sichere Energien und Frieden*, Campus, Frankfurt a. M./New York 2023.

The publication dates matter in comparing the books. Although all six were written after Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, only two cover the initial period of open warfare that began on 24 February 2022. Perović's "Rohstoffmacht Russland" was released in 2022, but he had finished the manuscript in the autumn of 2021. It seems unlikely that the empirical results would have been significantly different if all the authors had known about the outbreak of the war, but one might speculate that Perović's, Kremplin's, Balmaceda's, and Gustafson's overall interpretations might have been more pronounced.

This essay in particular focuses on the role of Germany in Soviet/Russian energy relations with the West. All books stress the impetus of various German governments in driving and facilitating imports of natural gas. In this regard, no major controversies or diverging interpretations arise. However, as I will argue, this and other recent research still has some blind spots. First, interpretations lean heavily towards political agency in the political economy of energy relations. Economic actors, and their interests, feature less prominently. Second, the international and transnational coordination and contentions of Soviet/Russian gas supply to Europe are neglected. Still, these books contribute to our understanding of the recent past, i.e., of Russia's ability to use energy as a coercive instrument in its expansionist strategy towards Ukraine and other countries. More generally, as I will synthesise in the conclusions, these publications add to a growing literature in energy studies and energy history as relatively new fields of social scientific, historical, and interdisciplinary research.

## 2 The Long View

In "Rohstoffmacht Russland" and in "The Bridge", Perović and Gustafson, respectively, provide sweeping accounts of international energy relations of the Soviet Union/Russia. Both books synthesise the authors' long-standing expertise and research output in the field. Perović headed a research project at Zurich University on "Energy and Power" from a cultural perspective<sup>8</sup> and is director at Zurich's Center for Eastern European Studies. His volume "Cold War Energy" is a household title for historians interested in Soviet energy history.<sup>9</sup> Gustafson has worked on energy politics for decades at Harvard University, the RAND Corporation, and, currently, Georgetown University.<sup>10</sup> Their respective fields of work—history for Perović, political science and consultancy for Gustafson—are evident in the books.

<sup>8</sup> Data Portal of the Swiss National Science Foundation: Energie und Macht. Eine kulturgeschichtliche Betrachtung von der frühen Sowjetzeit bis zum Russland der Gegenmacht, URL: <<https://data.snf.ch/grants/grant/157458>> [accessed: 19 January 2024]. Three other books came out of this research project, next to studies by Dunja Kremplin and Felix Rehschuh. Frey, Felix: Arktischer Heizraum. Das Energiesystem Kola zwischen regionaler Autarkie und gesamtstaatlicher Verflechtung 1928–1974 (Osteuropa in Geschichte und Gegenwart, Vol. 4), Böhlau, Köln et al. 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Perović, Jeronim (ed.): Cold War Energy. A Transnational History of Soviet Oil and Gas, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Georgetown University: Georgetown360. Thane Gustafson, URL: <<https://gufaculty360.georgetown.edu/s/contact/00336000014RbuEAAS/thane-gustafson>> [accessed: 15 April 2024].

Perović's book tackles a wider range, both in historical depth and analytical scope. "Rohstoffmacht Russland"<sup>11</sup> places Russia at the centre of a global history of energy from the late nineteenth century through the present. It is based on the author's extensive knowledge of the relevant literature as well as on his own empirical research, both archival and published sources. Perović places the book in a wider Western discourse, academic and public, in which gas is widely seen as a coercive instrument for Russia to pursue its national interest. This picture, according to Perović, is "incomplete" (p. 12). Instead, the author calls for an analytical approach that takes into account historical contingencies and the agency of Soviet/Russian decision-makers in establishing energy relations with Europe. Only in retrospect do the intricate German–Russian gas relations appear as a linear development that began during Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* as a result of a Bavarian attempt to become a gas hub (p. 113). The crucial phase for this dependency, however, was not in the 1970s or even the 1980s, but in the post-Soviet period of the 1990s and 2000s.

State power is a crucial category for Perović, but he does not interpret it as an all-embracing tool for Soviet/Russian expansionist policy, as much of the existing literature suggests. For Perović, gas and oil were not merely instruments of Soviet/Russian state power. They were also subject to conflict and crisis and show how "Moscow thought about its place and the country's role in international trade" (p. 21). The author considers oil and gas as a "lubricant" (*Schmiermittel*) for building trust in international relations that facilitated rapprochement and built connections that outlived the end of the Cold War. More broadly, Perović argues that this cultural approach allows for a deeper understanding of Soviet (and later Russian) self-perception in an increasingly interdependent global world.

After the concise introduction, Chapter 1 provides a brief overview of oil, capitalism, and geopolitics in modern history. This chapter sweeps across the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries to explain how carbon energy assumed such a vital role for modern societies. The Soviet Union and Russia became important producers of oil (and later gas), similar to the United States, the OPEC countries, and others. Yet Perović holds a special place for the Soviet Union/Russia. First, the Bolshevik Revolution contained the influence of multinational corporations on the national oil industry, and they retreated from a liberalised global economy of energy trade. Decades later, the gradual opening-up to energy trade after World War II was subject to the Soviet-style state economy. Second, Perović states that due to its vast natural resources, Russia holds a special place in global geopolitics that allowed it to remain largely self-sufficient in energy supply. Third, oil and gas became part of a societal identity (*gesellschaftliche Identität*) in the Soviet Union in the course of modernisation processes and propaganda campaigns. Perović evokes the famous *neftjanik* (oil worker) and *gazovik* (gas worker) as symbols of Soviet progress and prowess (p. 39).

The following chapters 2 to 5 are then structured chronologically, beginning with the early stages of Bolshevik power from 1917 to World War II (Chapter 2), the Cold War period (Chapter 3), the rise of the export industry in the 1970s and 1980s (Chapter 4), and the final stages of the Soviet Union and the post-Soviet

<sup>11</sup> Perović: Rohstoffmacht (see footnote 2).

era (Chapter 5). These chapters provide a comprehensive overview of state planning as in the GOELRO plan of 1920 and Soviet attempts to modernise economy and society. Perović meticulously reconstructs how first oil and later gas assumed important roles in the Soviet economy and how the state utilised these natural resources to strengthen its power both internally and in international relations. The author skilfully weaves this analytical focus into a general narrative of Soviet political and economic history.

Particularly interesting for this reviewer are the international trade relations in natural resources in the post–World War II period under conditions of the Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls (CoCom), the Western strategic embargo against the Soviet Union and its allies. The dilemma between natural wealth on the one hand and the need to import technology to exploit the resources that emerged on the other has shaped Soviet and later Russian energy relations with the West ever since. ‘Red oil’ from the Soviet Union was highly politicised, as in the failed Soviet attempt to include oil in a trade agreement with Great Britain in 1959 (p. 98). Even at such an early stage, fear of dependency already characterised Western trade policy with the Soviets.

Somewhat surprisingly, when comparing “Rohstoffmacht Russland” to the other books, Perović does not overly stress the German role in Soviet expansion of its oil and gas exports. The giant pipe-for-gas deal of 1970 with Mannesmann is only mentioned briefly, as well as Willy Brandt’s *Ostpolitik* and its underlying agenda to achieve *Wandel durch Handel*. Perović succinctly states that the Soviet Union was rather more interested in trade than in changing its system (p. 112). He also rightly points out that it was not only Brandt’s SPD that pursued energy imports from the Soviet Union; Bavarian Minister of Economy Otto Schedl from the archconservative and staunch anticommunist Christian Social Union (CSU) played a crucial role in facilitating the import of ‘red gas’—after all, the end point of the extended pipeline was to be in Waidhaus on the Bavarian border with Czechoslovakia.

Perović describes the expansionary phase of Soviet energy exports to Europe from the 1970s as a “path to dependency,” yet to him it was not the Western Europeans who became dependent. The author points to the growing importance of energy exports to sustain the Soviet economy and thereby the political power of the state (p. 145). The plummeting of global energy prices in the mid-1980s resulted in a speeding-up of the deterioration of Soviet power internally and among its allies. In this sense, Perović interprets the Soviet case as an example of the resource curse. In Putin’s Russia, dependency on energy exports grew even further, and by 2020, Russia’s imports and exports made up almost half of the country’s gross domestic product (p. 180).

The book tells a compelling and highly readable story of Soviet/Russian embeddedness in international energy relations, particularly in the wider European context. The global perspective is useful because it allows for a recalibration of the country’s role in an increasingly connected world in energy relations. In its archival scope, the book is confined to the Russian and Soviet perspective, including sources from the Russian State Archive of Economics (RGAĖ), the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI), and the Russian State Archives of Social and Political History (RGASPI). Perović, however, makes use of a wide array of published

sources from Germany (such as “Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik”), U.S. sources, and newspaper articles. Economic actors, such as companies, play a somewhat minor role in the analysis, as do countries ‘in between’, i.e., the transit countries of East-Central Europe. The analytical concepts such as “state power” and “dependency” remain vague and are not connected to respective theoretical literature in the fields of political economy. Perović also does not further develop the concept of trust as a “lubricant” in energy relations between East and West.<sup>12</sup> Here, a large body of theoretical literature and empirical studies on trust in the political economy might have further strengthened the book’s conceptual framework and allowed for wider theorisation. Overall, however, the book is very well written and highly approachable, including to a nonspecialist readership. An English translation would be laudable.

In concluding the book, Perović assesses the situation since Russia’s annexation of the Crimea in 2014. Here again, he paints a balanced picture of Russia’s interdependence with the West, embedding it in global energy markets. As he concluded for the Soviet area, Perović asserts that Putin’s system was indeed more dependent on its energy relations with Europe than vice versa. While Europe potentially could diversify its energy imports through new pipelines and liquefied gas terminals, Russia was stuck with the Soviet-era pipeline infrastructure going west. Russia’s “petro power”, i.e., its ability to use oil and gas as a weapon (*Energiewaffe*), thus was largely theoretical, a “social construction” (p. 191).

Perović claims that the “accusation that Russia is using its enormous oil and natural gas wealth to influence business negotiations in its favour or to achieve certain political goals cannot be completely dismissed” (p. 188). This interpretation might seem hollow in 2024, but it is important to keep in mind that the book was finished in 2021 when the author was still optimistic. Mutual interests, according to Perović, and above all Putin’s dependence on energy exports to secure his political power would prevail, and Russia would be “wary of straining relations with Europe too much” (p. 192). On the one hand, this “toxic mixture of energy and power” (p. 198) would for the time being prevent substantial changes to the autocratic system. On the other hand, Perović remained confident that Russia would continue to be a reliable supplier of energy to Europe as long as it depended on it for income. Thus, energy would retain its role as a “bridge” between Russia and Europe, a bridge that could provide a “soothing effect” in times of geopolitical turmoil (p. 193).

“The Bridge”,<sup>13</sup> incidentally, is the title of Thane Gustafson’s history of gas in Europe. This book is much more voluminous than “Rohstoffmacht Russland” and somewhat shorter in its historical depth by focusing on the post–World War II era. Although “The Bridge” essentially is a story of European gas relations with the Soviet Union/Russia, Gustafson includes the intra-European dimension in his

---

<sup>12</sup> There is a large and growing body of literature on the role of trust in political, social, and economic relations: Tilly, Richard H. (ed.): *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte/Economic History Yearbook* 46 (2005), No. 1: *Vertrauen/Trust*; Berghoff, Hartmut: *Die Zähmung des entfesselten Prometheus? Die Generierung von Vertrauenskapital und die Konstruktion des Marktes im Industrialisierungs- und Globalisierungsprozess*, in: Berghoff, Hartmut/Vogel, Jakob (eds.): *Wirtschaftsgeschichte als Kulturgeschichte. Dimensionen eines Perspektivenwechsels*, Campus, Frankfurt a.M. 2004, pp. 143–168; Frevert, Ute (ed.): *Vertrauen. Historische Annäherungen*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Gustafson: *Bridge* (see footnote 3).

analysis, in particular the North Sea supplies. He thus weaves together three stories: one of European integration and market liberalisation, one of Soviet/Russian gas supplies, and one of the conflictual dimension regarding Germany and Ukraine (“the axis of crisis,” p. 6). The book highlights the prominent role of Germany in facilitating the gas bridge between East and West, and retaining it, despite the growing political conflict with an aggressive Russia in the recent past.

Gustafson’s book is more deliberately confined to gas as a “relationship commodity,” unlike oil as an “arm’s-length commodity” (p. 7). Because gas transmission requires a fixed infrastructure such as pipelines (at least before the advent of liquefied natural gas), it tightly links producers and consumers. Once a pipeline crosses an intermediate country (as in the case of Ukraine), the picture becomes even more complex. As Perović does, Gustafson stresses the two faces of dependency in Soviet/Russian gas relations with Europe. While gas imports from the East became an ever-more important factor in the European energy mix, export sales in turn stabilised the late Soviet economy. Putin’s Russia became increasingly reliant on hydrocarbon exports. Much more strongly than Perović, Gustafson addresses the environmental debate in Europe and its potential meaning for the future of gas relations with Russia. From Gustafson’s perspective, decarbonisation and in particular the German *Energiewende* might indeed even increase Russia’s role as a gas supplier as European countries gradually wean off dirtier coal and oil. The German *Atomausstieg* and ongoing controversies about nuclear energy as ‘clean’ add to this complexity. Much more so than Perović, Gustafson includes national party politics and environmental movements as driving forces that shaped the bridge.

The book tells a chronological story, beginning with two separate strands. One focuses on the “Dutch model” of an efficient public–private partnership for managing and exploiting the North Sea deposits; the other focuses on how the Soviet energy sector developed simultaneously but followed a very different logic of state planning and coercion. With elegant prose and attention to detail, Gustafson gradually weaves these “Two Worlds of Gas” together into the comprehensive story that the “gas bridge” would become. Neutral Austria became key to this development when Austrian–Soviet negotiations of the 1960s produced the first contract for gas exports. This was not exactly the first gas deal with the West. After all, Austria was neutral, aligned with neither Western European institutions nor NATO. While the Austrian contract gradually introduced Soviet gas exports to the West, the Soviet Union also began exporting to its satellites in its own bloc—an aspect that Gustafson highlights and Perović somewhat neglects. The Austrian–Soviet agreement also opened up further negotiations and contracts with other countries, notably West Germany.

As Perović does in “Rohstoffmacht Russland”, Gustafson then guides the reader chronologically through the ensuing expansion of Soviet–European gas relations. However, he emphasises different aspects of this relationship. “The Bridge” tells both an intricate story of the early *gazoviks*’ effort to exploit the gas deposits in Western Siberia, as well as international and transnational connections, as in Austria’s petrol company OMV’s role in exploiting gas deposits on the border of Austria and Czechoslovakia. Gradually, an all-European story of gas integration emerges in the book that included the Eastern and Western blocs as well as neutral countries.



More so than Perović, Gustafson places Germany in the centre of this process of integration. Willy Brandt and West German *Ostpolitik* feature prominently in the chapters covering the 1970s, a decisive phase for Soviet energy relations with the West. Yet Gustafson appropriately also considers the role of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in an attempt with Poland to construct a joint gas pipeline along the route of the existing *Družhba* oil pipeline in the 1960s. Although this GDR–Polish project eventually failed, East Germany and Czechoslovakia built a joint pipeline from the Soviet border to the GDR that was finished in 1973. Within a few years after the failed Prague Spring revolution of 1968, Czechoslovakia thus assumed a pole position in transiting natural gas to East and West Germany. At this point, however, Gustafson contends that the “West German market was clearly the one the Soviets were after” (p. 66).

Gustafson considers *Ostpolitik* a “catalyst” (p. 71), highlighting the dramatic moment at Hotel Kaiserhof in the city of Essen where the first Soviet–German gas export contract was signed on 1 February 1970. And he rightly points to a range of actors who were instrumental in facilitating the new energy relationship aside from politicians. Although the crowd that assembled at Hotel Kaiserhof included prominent figures such as German Minister for Economic Affairs Karl Schiller and Soviet Foreign Trade Minister Nikolai Patolichev, Gustafson calls other attendants the “stars of the day”, among them Herbert Schelberger, chairman of Ruhrgas AG. Yet while the author correctly gives examples of private companies such as Ruhrgas (later E.ON), Thyssengas, and BASF as well as state enterprises such as OMV, Gaz de France, and British Gas in his narrative, corporate actors or industry associations play a minor role in his story.

What emerges throughout the book is the essential European character of gas. Gustafson meticulously reconstructs the exploitation of the North Sea gas deposits by Great Britain, Norway, and the Netherlands and explains how the comparison with the Soviet Union is telling regarding the efficiency of state capitalism. The role of the United States, on the other hand, is somewhat neglected in the book. Gustafson mentions the Reagan embargo of 1981 and 1982 only in passing, even though he asserts that “[t]he confrontation that followed bore an eerie resemblance to the debate over the Nord Stream 2 pipeline today, but with some significant differences” (p. 159).

The author leaves the global dimension of “The Bridge” somewhat aside, focusing primarily on the European integration and, above all, the German role. Chapter 8, “The Battle for Germany”, serves as a crucial hinge in the book, connecting the Cold War era to the present. Gustafson dissects the political, economic, and environmental upheavals of the 1990s and 2000s, when Germany liberalised its gas market and Gerhard Schröder’s government announced the *Atomausstieg* in 1998. The following two chapters turn attention to the other big player in the game, Gazprom. Schröder and Putin personally oversaw the signing of the Nord Stream 1 pipeline contract in September 2005, a joint project that in Poland and the Baltic countries was eerily reminiscent of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact of 1939. A few months later, after losing the federal election, Schröder infamously became chairman of Nord Stream AG’s shareholders’ committee (p. 365).

The remainder of the book reconstructs a more familiar story of Ukrainian political turmoil, worsening Russian–Ukrainian relations, and the European Union (EU)’s third energy package of 2009. Here again, Gustafson puts Germany at the centre of a story that is increasingly marked by conflict. Long-term Chancellor Angela Merkel emerges as a main actor in the game leading up to the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, a project that she considered “first and foremost an economic project” of “private investors” (p. 380). The SPD ministers Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Sigmar Gabriel also receive Gustafson’s close attention as key figures in cosyng up to Putin. Yet the book rightly points to the wider European embeddedness of German–Russian gas relations. For example, Gustafson in great detail addresses the role of the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Competition (DG-COMP) in countering Gazprom’s thrust to dominate the European gas market.

Gustafson uses extensive data (and includes a special thanks in the acknowledgements to IHS Markit, a commercial information service provider), analyses in energy economics (such as by Angela Stent and Kirsten Westphal), official documents (for examples of EU institutions), and media reporting, laudably not only from English-language outlets. He also refers to relevant historical overviews in the literature, in particular Per Högselius’s “Red Gas”<sup>14</sup>, and more general books on European history such as those by Tony Judt and Mark Mazower. Unfortunately, the more specialised literature on the twentieth-century history of energy is largely absent in the book. Referring to Falk Flade’s historical analysis “Energy Infrastructures in the Eastern Bloc”<sup>15</sup> from 2017, for example, would have shed more light on the Polish perspective. In general, the perspectives of eastern–central European and post-Soviet countries, notably the Baltic states, feature less prominently in the book than they could have. Gustafson also barely includes Perović’s “Cold War Energy”. Extensive endnotes provide a good overview of the primary and secondary sources employed in the book, but “The Bridge” lacks a bibliography. The book, however, provides many illustrative maps and tables that back the compelling narrative with quantitative data. It meticulously presents the technical and organisational details of the gas market, such as pricing, and makes these complex processes accessible to a nonspecialist audience.

“The Bridge” as a metaphor for pipeline connections between Siberian gas fields and consumers in both Western and Eastern Europe works well but is somewhat overly used in other contexts in the book (p. 414). The book ends with Gustafson predicting two possible scenarios. First, an optimistic ‘Golden Age of Gas’ will see the ongoing rise of natural gas to become the dominant bridge fuel in the world’s energy transition by the middle of the century. Although this scenario is threatened by the risk of geopolitical conflict, Russia’s own pivot to East Asia in exporting energy, and the conflict in Ukraine, Gustafson holds it as realistic and as one “in which gas professionals believe strongly” (p. 405). Notably, even the conflict in Ukraine would

<sup>14</sup> Högselius, Per: *Red Gas. Russia and the Origins of European Energy Dependence*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2013.

<sup>15</sup> Flade, Falk: *Energy Infrastructures in the Eastern Bloc. Poland and the Construction of Transnational Electricity, Oil, and Gas Systems (Studien zur Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte Ostmitteleuropas, Vol. 26)*, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 2017.

not disrupt the scenario of a growing importance of Russia's gas bridge with the EU. The second "Environmental Scenario. Expectations for Gas Confounded" (p. 411), is more cautious about natural gas as a bridge fuel. Policymakers and the general public seem hesitant to expand its use for environmental reasons; after all, gas is still a carbon-based source of energy. Here again, Gustafson specifically highlights an ambivalent Germany and calls gas the "unloved child of the German *Energiewende*" (p. 412). For the imminent future, the author predicts that the promises of the 'Golden Age' will hold and that natural gas will continue its rise as a bridge fuel until the middle of the century, to be gradually supplanted by the second scenario. Gustafson thus concludes with the rather positive assessment that "even under an environmental scenario, the Russian-European gas bridge would survive for another several decades" (p. 413). Published in 2020, "The Bridge"'s prognostic ending is now part of a very different outcome in the history of Russian–European energy relations.

### 3 Soviet and Russian Energy Empires

The books by Dunja Krempin and Margarita Balmaceda are narrower in scope and intended for a specialised audience. Krempin's "Die Sibirische Wucht" (The Siberian Brunt)<sup>16</sup> is the published Ph.D. dissertation that she completed in 2019 at Zurich University as a member of Jeronim Perović's project "Energy and Power." It addresses the period from 1964 to 1982 and the Soviet Union's emergence as a global gas power. Krempin places her research into the historical assessment of Cold War politics and Soviet attempts to enter a new era of diplomatic and economic relations with the West. It is no coincidence that her period of investigation corresponds to Leonid Brezhnev's incumbency as Soviet leader. Krempin interprets Brezhnev's energy policy as "détente" and a decisive break from the Stalinist policy of economic autarky (pp. 15f.). The author points to a dearth of research in particular concerning the economic dimension of Soviet *détente* that she considers to be the root of Soviet energy relations with the West. Per Högselius's "Red Gas"<sup>17</sup> features prominently in the book's introduction as one exceptional study that addresses Soviet–West German energy relations. Krempin's own focus lies in the inner-Soviet debates on opening up the vast gas reserves in Western Siberia for export. Her overarching—and somewhat clumsily formulated—question is why the Soviet Union emerged as a global power in natural gas from the 1960s to the 1980s ("[w]arum die Sowjetunion unter Ausschluss anderer gewünschter und möglicher beziehungsweise unmöglicher Optionen in den 1960er bis 1980er Jahren zur Gasmacht mit globaler Relevanz aufstieg", p. 29).

---

<sup>16</sup> Krempin: Wucht (see footnote 4).

<sup>17</sup> Högselius: Gas (see footnote 14).

Krempin places her study in the context of newer research on Soviet energy history<sup>18</sup> but does not provide a theoretical grounding to her analysis. Instead, she follows a clear empirical approach that addresses three topical dimensions: first, the Soviet attempt to provide a secure energy supply (*Energieversorgungssicherheit*) as one key factor to legitimise its power; second, the actors and media debates in the exploitation of the Western Siberian oil and gas deposits; and third, the international dimension of Soviet energy security in cooperation with state and economic actors from other countries (pp. 30–35). Krempin introduces the reader to the fundamentals of Soviet economic geography in oil and gas. In particular, she stresses the climatic difficulties in exploiting resources in polar and subpolar regions and the remoteness of the reserves. Building a vast new infrastructure and relocating workers to the “Zapadno-Sibirskij Neftegazovyj kompleks” (West Siberian oil and gas complex; p. 42) was thus crucial—and costly—in establishing the Soviet gas industry.

The main strength of “Die Sibirische Wucht” is its empirical basis. Krempin mentions the difficulties in gaining access to relevant archival records, particularly at RGANI, given the political sensitivity of Soviet energy history even at the time of her research. Still, the author recovered a massive wealth of sources from various archives in Moscow (the State Archive of the Russian Federation [GARF], RGAE, RGASPI, the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences [ARAN]) and even from the regional State Archive of Socio-Political History of Tyumen Oblast (GASPITO) in Tyumen in Western Siberia. In addition, she used a wide variety of published sources, including memoirs, speeches, and source editions, in particular the German “Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik” and the U.S. “Foreign Relations of the United States” series. Krempin also considers Soviet newspapers—especially “Pravda”—a valuable source that not merely reflected the official party line but served as a forum to discuss divergent positions on energy politics relatively openly. Occasionally, the author employs Western media outlets such as “Der Spiegel” to address the Western perceptions of the Soviet Union. Krempin also has an excellent grasp of the historical literature on post-World War II Soviet history. As with Perović’s book, an English translation of “Die Sibirische Wucht” would be very welcome, not the least because replicating Krempin’s extremely valuable empirical contribution on Soviet energy history is currently impossible, as Russian archives likely will stay closed to independent researchers in the foreseeable future.

Krempin organises the rich source material in a chronological order, beginning with the early formation of Soviet gas industry under Nikita Khrushchev. The main part of the analysis, eight chapters in total, is then dedicated to the Brezhnev era and the development of the “gas north” (Chapter 5). In Chapter 6, the author addresses the complex international relationships in expanding exports of oil and gas both to the West and to the Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe in the context of the U.S. embargo policy and the eventually failed North Star pipeline project between the Soviet Union and the United States (p. 212). At the same time, “Die Sibirische Wucht” covers not only the high politics of energy in the Soviet Union but also

<sup>18</sup> For example, Felix Rehschuh’s study on the Soviet oil industry: *Aufstieg zur Energiemacht. Der sowjetische Weg ins Erdölzeitalter, 1930er bis 1950er Jahre* (Osteuropa in Geschichte und Gegenwart, Vol. 1), Böhlau, Köln et al. 2018.

the social aspects of recruiting, sustaining, and retaining workers in an inhospitable region. Voices from below are mainly absent, but official reports and other documents paint a clear picture of hardship, including among the workers' families, leading to very high levels of fluctuation (p. 312).

Krempin analyses her material close to the sources with great attention to detail. She reconstructs a comprehensive picture of the Soviet gas industry along several dimensions. These include the perceptions and utopian thinking of Soviet leadership in economic planning and attention to debates and controversies within the Soviet leadership and its bureaucratic apparatus, as well as the role of institutions on all levels of the state bureaucracy such as the *Glavki*, *Mingo*, *Gosplan*, and *Glavtjumenneftegaz*. It becomes clear that the emergence of Soviet gas industry was not the result of a comprehensive master plan but was subject to conflict. Krempin stresses the role of individual actors—the author calls them “lobbyists” (p. 47)—such as Nikolai Baibakov and Alexei K. Kortunov, both on the regional level and in Moscow. The author weaves the gas story into the wider context of the Soviet system, its decision-making processes, and the economic and social order. She points to the role of infrastructures and the inherent problems in the Soviet state economy. Urban planning, the role of science, and the environmental impact of the energy industry are also covered in the analysis.

Each chapter ends with a brief summary, making it easy for hurried readers to take in the main points. Krempin stresses that gas exports to the West paid for imports of machinery, technology, and equipment and hence enabled the Soviet Union to develop a sophisticated energy industry (p. 413). German politics and companies became one group of crucial partners in this process, but they were not alone in benefiting from the Soviet demand of equipment and knowledge and the supply of energy. The business of energy imports and equipment exports involved other national and nonnational actors, particularly from the United Kingdom and France. For Krempin, Germany emerged as a driving force but not the only European player in furthering energy relations with the Soviet Union.

Krempin shows the underlying reasons why energy exports were virtually a necessity to stabilise the Soviet economy, society, and, hence, the state's power (pp. 186–198). Her chronological endpoint is the Urengoy–Pomary–Uzhhorod export pipeline, a joint project that several Western countries and companies pursued from the late 1970s onwards against the explicit resistance of the United States. After the failed Reagan embargo of 1981/1982, it was swiftly completed. Krempin contends that this pipeline is at the root of current close energy relations between Russia and Europe. Contrary to Soviet expectations, however, this pipeline did not suffice to modernise the Soviet economy (p. 404).

While Krempin's analysis is driven by archival sources, Balmaceda's “Russian Energy Chains”<sup>19</sup> follows a distinct theoretical and methodological agenda. The author is professor of diplomacy and international relations at Seton Hall University in New Jersey and a long-time scholar of Russian energy politics. Her work on the book included many stints at research institutions in Europe and North America and engaging with a vast network of experts, both social scientists and historians.

---

<sup>19</sup> Balmaceda: Chains (see footnote 5).

Published in 2021, it was written during the time of growing antagonism of Russian military aggression against Ukraine that had not yet erupted in the full-scale war that began in early 2022.

“Russian Energy Chains” is structured in three parts, beginning with the author’s conceptual framework in chapters 1 to 3 (p. 207). Balmaceda develops a comprehensive approach for the analysis of energy chains, by far the most theoretically informed and methodologically ambitious of all six books in this review essay. The result is more abstract, conceptually much denser, and more focused on creating a scientific model than, for example, Gustafson’s elegant narrative. Balmaceda identifies scholars and students of political science, international relations, and related fields, in particular students in undergraduate courses on energy politics, as her key audience (p. xv). This rather narrow scope is somewhat surprising because the book holds valuable insights beyond Balmaceda’s own field of expertise, including political economy and the economics of trade, and insights not just in social science but also for historiography.

Balmaceda’s analysis rests on her interest in the relationship between energy and power. She vividly rejects the mainline view in the literature that Russia has been strategically employing its energy prowess as a weapon against other states, particular post-Soviet countries. Instead, she suggests that these energy relations also provided significant income to these countries and benefited local actors within them. In addition to the potential threat of becoming energy dependent on Russia, these actors could also see an opportunity or even temptation in energy dependency. Balmaceda concedes that “this sounds highly controversial” (p. 4), but she plausibly addresses how actors might obtain corrupt gains from Russian energy. Moreover, the author states that the rewards in participating in these energy chains “came most prominently not from sales to end consumers at the physical end of the value chain, but mainly from transit and other midstream activities facilitating access to profits, subsidies, and rents” (ibid.). This approach allows Balmaceda to shift attention to the transit countries’ own interests and agency, thus “bringing the midstream back in” (p. 25) to the study of energy relations. The book’s main question thus asks how Russia’s energy chains affected power relations in the countries involved, such as Ukraine and Belarus.

Balmaceda’s period of investigation is narrow, focusing on the time between October 2011 (when the Nord Stream 2 pipeline was commissioned) and March 2014 (Russia’s annexation of the Crimea). Given the author’s attention to the effect of path dependency, this period seems rather short, and Balmaceda barely includes the relevant historiography to give the paths more historical depth. Her methodological approach, however, is innovative and very productive for two reasons. First, Balmaceda addresses the entire value chain in Russian energy exports (upstream, midstream, and downstream), including the technical steps needed to supply energy from producers to consumers. Using the concept of global value chains (not supply chains!), the author emphasises the changes in value (addition or subtraction) “as goods move through this chain” (p. 23). Second, she pursues a comparative approach in looking at three distinct fuels, namely gas, oil, and coal. In this context, Balmaceda turns attention to the materiality of these goods, as these fuels have distinct chemical properties, which in turn have massive consequences on how

their respective energy chains work, and hence affect the resulting power relations (p. 26). The author employs cultural theories of Bruno Latour and Arjun Appadurai in constructing a model of human–material interaction. In implementing her methodological approach, Balmaceda tackles one segment of Russia’s energy chains: the routes from Siberia (gas and oil) and the Kuzbass region (coal) via Ukraine to the final destinations in Germany.

The remainder of the book is structured in two parts. In Part II, Balmaceda traces the energy chains in detail. Part III provides a concise analytical summary and outlook into the post-2014 world. Figures, maps, and tables provide useful illustrations and help make the complex conceptual framework accessible. Chapters 4 to 6 in the first part follow the paths of gas, oil, and coal. Balmaceda meticulously paints an overarching picture of the value chains with great attention to detail even on the micro level. Important steps on these routes, such as Avdiivka (the site of a coking coal plant) or the Azovstal plant at Mariupol, might seem all too familiar with the readership today. The Azovstal plant, where Ukrainian forces held out against overwhelming Russian force in the early stages of the war in 2022, serves as a case in point for Balmaceda’s keen analysis. This plant was supplied with coke from Avdiivka and emerged as one of the world’s most important producers of steel slabs around 2010. Balmaceda provides technical detail to the complex production processes as well as the institutional fabric of control in eastern Ukraine. Regional figures such as Rinat Akhmetov (a coal and steel oligarch) and his firms such as Metinvest, which controlled Azovstal, feature prominently. Azovstal emerges as one key factor in the “Donetsk energy-political system” (p. 194) and as a crucial node in the energy chain between East and West. To put it simply, Russia’s gas chain going west did not only stay in the hands of Gazprom but included a wide variety of other actors in Russia, in Ukraine, and in Germany.

In Chapter 7, Balmaceda takes up these empirical threads to evaluate the relationship of energy and political power both empirically and theoretically. One of Balmaceda’s key insights is that none of the energy chains in gas, oil, or coals was fully vertically integrated from Russia via Ukraine to Germany. Moreover, the author contends that “these chains were most often not masterminded by the initial producer from extraction to sale to final users, but that the end of the value chain was the result of a series of decisions and transactions throughout the chain; interactions at various stages in the chain, not only its end supply point, turned out to have important power implications” (p. 215). This result held large implications, as well as for historical analyses of Soviet energy relations with the West that, as Krempin also shows, likewise were contingent and depended on situational constellations of actors, institutions, and markets.

Balmaceda considers her period of investigation as the “calm before the storm” (p. 228). In the final chapter she extends this story to the more recent past, covering the rocky road from Russian military aggression that began in April 2014, Western sanctions, and the EU flexing its regulatory muscle concerning the OPAL pipeline. In addressing the increasing role of liquefied natural gas (LNG) in political decision-making and the public discourse, she again shows the value of addressing the materiality of fossil fuels as a key factor in explaining energy politics (p. 249).

“Russian Energy Chains” draws on a wide literature, both theoretical and empirical. The author’s own empirical contribution lies in assembling a wide array of sources, quantitative and textual, and in establishing a comprehensive conceptual framework for analysis. The book provides key insights into the role of a wide range of actors and institutions (such as the barter system) in the midstream transit of energy. The book is not an easy read. Balmaceda addresses complex models and theoretical concepts and often uses technical language. Sometimes, sentences are overly long and complex. This may be understandable, since the author explicitly states that the book is written for a specialised audience. Perhaps it is a missed opportunity to interest a much wider potential audience in social science and history programs. At the very least, however, all readers benefit from the comprehensive information assembled in Appendix A (glossary of technical terms), Appendix B (main actors), and Appendix C (chronology). Extensive notes with references and a vast bibliography further provide useful information for students and scholars alike.

In summing up her results, Balmaceda concedes a crucial role of rent-seeking actors within transit countries—particularly in Ukraine—in increasing energy dependence on Russia. At the same time, the author highlights the role of the EU in misjudging the risk associated with growing energy imports from Russia. Here, Balmaceda is surprisingly cautious in her wording, merely stating that “the EU may have been too naïve” and “not always properly equipped to deal with issues requiring clear intervention and investment above and beyond that by private actors, which, for example, may not see a business rationale for investments in import diversification infrastructure to reduce dependency on Russia” (pp. 249f.). Would this critique have been more pronounced had Balmaceda finished “Russian Energy Chains” a year later? In any case, the final two books in this review (both published in 2023) take a much more explicit stance in identifying the main culprit for European energy dependence on Russia: Germany, or rather an unholy coalition of German–Russian actors.

#### 4 German Blunders

“Die Moskau-Connection. Das Schröder-Netzwerk und Deutschlands Weg in die Abhängigkeit” and “Schockwellen” are intended for a wider audience and—if “Der Spiegel”’s bestseller list and glowing reviews in news outlets are any indicator—have performed exceptionally well in this regard. Their timely publication (“Schockwellen” in February 2023, “Die Moskau Connection” 1 month later) met with a deeply concerned German public that had been constantly reminded of Russia’s place in German energy supply in the preceding winter months, along with the extensive media coverage of Russia’s aggressive warfare and atrocities in Ukraine. Both books are rather sensational, and not only in their subtitles. Nonetheless, they tell a convincing story of German incompetence in energy strategy, which included neglect of basic political economy principles and blatant underestimation of German and wider European geopolitical interests.



Reinhard Bingener and Markus Wehner are experienced journalists of the “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung”, the latter formerly working as the newspaper’s Moscow correspondent. Their story about “Die Moskau-Connection”<sup>20</sup> focuses on one individual and his network: former Chancellor Gerhard Schröder. As the book’s subtitle (“The Path to Dependency”) indicates, the authors leave no doubt whom they hold responsible for the disaster in German foreign policy that led to the bizarre meeting of Chancellor Olaf Scholz with Vladimir Putin on 15 February 2022 at the vastly oversized white table in the Kremlin that provides the book’s opening scene. “Die Moskau-Connection” then moves on to reconstruct the chronological road to Moscow a few days before Russia’s attack on Ukraine. Schröder and his SPD and Russian friends form the backbone of a narrative that emerges as a biography-cum-drama. The authors consider the resulting energy dependency and German naivety vis-à-vis Putin no less than “the biggest mistake of German foreign policy since the foundation of the Federal Republic [of Germany]” in 1949 (p. 7).

The book begins with the early career of both protagonists, Schröder and Putin. It tells a compelling story full of anecdotes and personal details. The networks of both men were male dominated. In Schröder’s case, beer, football, and the car industry feature prominently. More relevant to this reviewer are Schröder’s early travels to Moscow and his critical stance towards the United States, including his resistance to the NATO Double-Track Decision of 1979. Bingener and Wehner outline Schröder’s various circles of alliance in meticulous detail, among them prominent fellow SPD members (p. 20) and businesspeople (p. 22). Furthermore, they highlight the dynamic changes of roles between politics and business and the role of key media actors such as “Der Spiegel”, “Bild”/Axel Springer, and Switzerland’s Ringier. The biographical sketch of Putin highlights his well-known KGB connections and special relationship with Germany, where he witnessed the collapse of the GDR regime in Dresden. After this initial shock about the Soviet Union’s demise, and in the course to his own rise to political power, Putin then strategically employed energy in Russia’s post-Soviet rise to renewed imperial glory. As the authors note in detail, a cold-blooded Putin also showed his willingness to employ violence (“War from the beginning”, p. 48) to achieve his political goals early on in his presidency.

“Die Moskau-Connection” places its protagonist in a wider context of Willy Brandt’s policy towards the Eastern bloc (*Wandel durch Annäherung*), bluntly calling it the “myth” of German social democracy. The SPD emerges as the driving force behind a failed “repressive” (p. 61) *Ostpolitik* of the 1980s, with the authors telling a story of ignorance and incompetence, as well as rampant anti-Americanism in the German political left. It was thus only consequential that Brandt and Egon Bahr focused on energy imports from the Soviet Union as a key element of *Ostpolitik*. The book’s longest chapters, 5 and 6, address the growing personal relationship between Schröder and Putin and the intricate network of associates and their firms that grew out of it. This special relationship continued after Schröder’s demise as chancellor in 2005 under fellow SPD politicians such as Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Sigmar Gabriel, when the German–Russian connection entered a phase of “toxic relationship” (p. 166). Even after Russia’s annexation of the Crimea in 2014, the

---

<sup>20</sup> Bingener/Wehner: Moskau-Connection (see footnote 6).

assassination attempt on Alexei Navalny in 2020, and countless other demonstrations of Putin's authoritarian regime, Schröder and his clique continued their appeasing stance towards Russia.

Bingener and Wehner's interpretation has a lot going for it. Too obvious are Schröder and his clique's countless neglects and irresponsible ignorance vis-à-vis an increasingly aggressive Putin. The book provides much detail and shocking anecdotes in a sweeping narrative. At times, it resembles more a tribunal or indictment than a balanced analysis. It is also heavily one-sided, almost partisan. Overall, "Die Moskau-Connection" paints a picture that is too narrow. First, it almost exclusively addresses what Balmaceda calls the "downstream" dimension of Russia's energy chains, i.e., the political, business, and consumer beneficiaries of Siberian gas in Germany. Neither the inner complexities of Soviet/Russian production of energy nor the midstream countries and their interests are properly addressed. Second, Bingener and Wehner barely consult the recent scholarly debate on German–Russian energy relations in the social sciences and in historiography. Their book relies largely on memoirs, biographies, and general historical overviews but on barely any specialised analyses (Dietmar Bleidick's excellent analysis of Ruhrgas is one notable exception).<sup>21</sup> Third, while German Social Democrats for good reasons get their share of Bingener and Wehner's blame, other potential suspects are ignored. The authors address corporate interests—firms and their lobbies—only as far as they were part of Schröder's inner circle. Otto Wolff von Amerongen, the *Ost-Ausschuss der Deutschen Wirtschaft*, and other industry associations should have deserved more attention.<sup>22</sup> The authors cite the boss of Ruhrgas, Burckhard Bergmann, who sharply criticised Gabriel's economic ministry for selling the largest German gas storage facility to Gazprom. Yet the entire story of German–Russian energy relations resembles more a public–private partnership in which political blunders and economic interests were deeply intertwined. Helmut Kohl, Schröder's predecessor as chancellor from the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), is virtually absent in the book, as are the Bavarian energy politics of the CSU.<sup>23</sup> Several generations of Free Democratic Party (FDP) politicians helped shape German–Soviet/Russian energy relations in relevant federal ministries—among them prominent Minister for Economic Affairs Otto Graf Lambsdorff and Minister for Foreign Affairs Hans-Dietrich Genscher, both ardent supporters of energy imports from the Soviet Union. Chancellor Angela Merkel emerges as a weak bystander without the guts to change the direction of German–Russian relations.

Finally, the authors do not disclose their sources, unfortunately making the book difficult to work with in the scholarly debate. *Die Moskau-Connection* comes largely

<sup>21</sup> Bleidick, Dietmar: Die Ruhrgas 1926 bis 2013. Aufstieg und Ende eines Marktführers (Schriftenreihe zur Zeitschrift für Unternehmensgeschichte, Vol. 30), De Gruyter Oldenbourg, Berlin et al. 2017.

<sup>22</sup> The authors' colleagues at the "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung", Sebastian Balzter and Marcus Theurer, provide a much more balanced assessment concerning the *Ost-Ausschuss* in a long essay on "Russia's friends"; see Balzter, Sebastian/Theurer, Marcus: Russlands Freunde, in: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 1 May 2022.

<sup>23</sup> Schattenberg, Susanne: Pipeline Construction as "Soft Power" in Foreign Policy. Why the Soviet Union Started to Sell Gas to West Germany, 1966–1970, in: Journal of Modern European History 20 (2022), No. 4, pp. 554–573.

without endnotes or references to sources. Most of the empirical material seems to be from the public discourse, media reporting in particular. Other sources, let alone archival material, are largely untouched. In the search for culprits, Bingener and Wehner too quickly narrow down on one important, but not the only, dimension of German–Russian energy relations. The most recent past, especially Angela Merkel and her post-Fukushima snap decision in 2011 to phase out nuclear power, climate change, and the *Energiewende* more broadly are part of a history that involves other actors and their interests. This much wider scope of German–Russian energy relations is the focus of the last book in this review.

The author of “Schockwellen”<sup>24</sup>, Claudia Kemfert, is an economist and head of the Energy, Transportation, Environment Department at the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW Berlin); is professor of energy economics and energy politics at Leuphana University Lüneburg; and has served in various functions as a political advisor. She also is prominent in various media channels. Her book addresses the “shock” of the German public after Russia’s attack on Ukraine in February 2022, rightly pointing out that this was far from surprising for informed scholars because “energy is a weapon in Putin’s master plan” (p. 15). More so than the other books in this review, Kemfert places German–Russian energy relations in the context of energy politics and climate change more broadly. The book’s subtitle, “Last Chance for Secure Energy and Peace,” thus refers to the transition to clean energy as the key in overcoming Germany’s dependency on Russian fossil fuels. Perhaps tellingly, “Schockwellen” was endorsed by prominent German public figures such as Luisa Neubauer (activist from Fridays for Future), Sven Plöger (meteorologist and TV weather presenter), and Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker (former politician and environmental scientist).

Kemfert structures her book in ten chapters with many short sections, making it easily accessible for a nonacademic readership. She uses very simple language, sometimes extremely so, as well as short paragraphs so that parts of the book resemble more a listing of bullet points than a narrative. Given her wider agenda, Kemfert first introduces her audience to the relationship between energy, politics, and economics. She rightly points out that scientific evidence on climate change and the political economy of energy dependency—for example, many studies by the DIW Berlin—has been widely neglected in Germany by politicians, the private sector, and the wider public. Her appeal to heed scientific evidence is very welcome, as is her careful assessment of the reliability of prognoses and future scenarios (p. 45). Her verdict, however, is clear: Generations of German decision-makers in various governments have vastly underestimated the dangers of climate change and geopolitical risk in relying on fossil imports from an authoritarian, imperialist Russia. At the same time, Kemfert shows, in an illuminating, partially autobiographical section, how energy economics as a field of research gradually emerged to counter complacency and ignorance in light of these epochal challenges (p. 57).

From Chapter 3 to Chapter 8, “Schockwellen” then tells a largely chronological story of Germany’s growing dependence on Russian fossil fuels, similar to “Die Moskau-Connection”. More so than Bingener and Wehner, however, Kemfert

---

<sup>24</sup> Kemfert: Schockwellen (see footnote 7).

stresses the wider coalition of actors engaged in the process, notably German firms such as E.ON and BASF and the hapless role of Angela Merkel. The author criticises the chancellor's handling of Russia and the deep energy connection inherited from her predecessors. Moreover, Kemfert succinctly points to Merkel's background in physics and her scientific understanding of the world ("Wissenschafts-Ader"). Yet this did not keep Merkel from fatally neglecting climate change in her policies, and the author rightly asks "why so many decisions in energy policy were made during Merkel's chancellorship that are far from any scientific insights" (p. 144).

Kemfert in particular stresses the role of the DIW Berlin—and her own—in providing scientific expertise and policy advice in energy economics and politics. In the mid-2000s the institute had already issued reports that warned of growing energy dependence on Russia. One key piece of advice for the German government was to invest in LNG terminals to counter the effects. It was not heeded. Kemfert and DIW Berlin also vehemently argued against the construction of the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines, to no avail (pp. 102 f.). While the "DIW Wochenbericht" number 27 of 2018 ran the headline "Another Baltic Sea-Pipeline Is Unnecessary,"<sup>25</sup> politicians across party lines as well as corporate actors celebrated the next step in solidifying German dependence on Russian gas.

In the final two chapters of "Schockwellen", Kemfert returns to the book's overarching agenda of clean energy transition and international peace. She vividly counters German fears of energy scarcity and ensuing deindustrialisation and considers so-called bridge technologies entirely unnecessary for the *Energiewende*. Hence, Kemfert believes that increasing German gas imports from Russia is not only politically dangerous but is also economically unsound and detrimental for an effective climate policy. Despite the effort of intense corporate and political lobbying in blocking or slowing down the energy transition, the book ends with a more positive outlook in pointing to many local and regional initiatives, largely from below, to change the way energy is produced, stored, and consumed. These initiatives, however, are not enough. Referring to the looming tipping point in the world's climate, Kemfert calls for speeding up energy transition and decoupling from Russian fossil fuels.

"Schockwellen" is based on the extensive scientific expertise of DIW Berlin and of the author herself. Kemfert occasionally also draws on the wider literature in historiography and the social sciences, notably the works of historian Karl Schlögel and political scientist Gwendolyn Sasse. As in "Die Moskau-Connection", the book does not include endnotes, and the selected bibliography in the appendix is rather short. Even books for a wider audience should include references in times of heated mistrust and debates about 'alternative facts'. Kemfert is the only author in this review sample who entails a clear and far-reaching agenda in calling for policy change. Her solutions—or rather her stark criticism of missed opportunities—occasionally seem a bit overly simplified. For example, it remains questionable whether an instant and comprehensive Western energy embargo after 24 February 2022 would have de-

<sup>25</sup> Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung (ed.): DIW Wochenbericht No. 27/2018.

tered Putin.<sup>26</sup> Yet while the style of her presentation might lead to raised eyebrows in an academic audience, the book successfully transports the author's message and underlying scientific expertise to a wider public.

## 5 Who Is Dependent on Whom, and the Future of Energy Studies

All six books stress the complementary structure in East–West energy relations (Russia has a lot of energy; the West wants to buy it), and “dependency” is employed as an important category, yet in quite different ways.<sup>27</sup> Krempin stresses the importance of energy exports in sustaining the late Soviet economy and hence its own growing reliance on global energy markets. Gustafson and Perović address the interdependence of energy suppliers and consumers in international relations, whereas Balmaceda brings the intricate connections of transit countries in these energy chains to the forefront. While the German factor (both economically and politically) plays an important role for all four authors, it is “Die Moskau-Connection” and “Schockwellen” that single out the role of generations of politicians from Brandt to Merkel and business leaders from Otto Wolff von Amerongen to Burckhard Bergmann in cementing a dangerous German reliance on Soviet/Russian fossil fuels. Their verdict is vaguely reminiscent of historical interpretations of German–Soviet relations in the interwar period from Rapallo to the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, a version 2.0 of an “unholy alliance” or “devil’s pact” between Germany and an autocratic Russia.<sup>28</sup> The books also reflect the contingent dynamic of historical processes. In their interpretation of long-term path dependencies, it matters greatly whether the books were published before or after 24 February 2022. The results also show the pitfalls of social scientific forecasting and the seeming ease of writing after the fact.

These diverging perspectives, interpretations, and sources in the review sample indicate that not all is said and researched concerning the history and present of German and wider European energy relations with the Soviet Union/Russian Federation. I will summarise my criticism in four points. First, while dependency is such a prominent category not just in this review sample but also in the wider literature, it is striking how little it is theorised, conceptualised, and operationalised. In order to employ dependency as an analytical concept, further research needs to more closely incorporate dependency theories and political economy approaches, both in the social sciences and in historiography. Moreover, a conceptual and discourse analysis

---

<sup>26</sup> For example, Mulder's historical analysis shows the limits of economic sanctions in warfare: Mulder, Nicholas: *The Economic Weapon. The Rise of Sanctions as a Tool of Modern War*, Yale UP, New Haven, CT//London 2022.

<sup>27</sup> See also Balmaceda, Margarita M.: *The Politics of Energy Dependency. Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania between Domestic Oligarchs and Russian Pressure*, Toronto UP, Toronto 2013.

<sup>28</sup> Prantl, Heribert: *Ein Teufelspakt? Nord Stream 2 im Licht der Geschichte: Vor hundert Jahren wurde der Rapallo Vertrag zwischen Deutschland und Sowjetrußland geschlossen*, in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 13 February 2022; Haffner, Sebastian: *Der Teufelspakt. Die deutsch-russischen Beziehungen vom Ersten zum Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Manesse, Zürich 1988; Freund, Gerald: *Unholy Alliance. Russian-German Relations from the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk to the Treaty of Berlin*, Chatto & Windus, London 1957.

of “dependency” could show how the term entered the public sphere, how it was employed, by whom, and what strategic interests these actors pursued.

Second, the books tell primarily a political story of decision-making in the energy sector, international energy relations, and rent-seeking. Corporate actors and their interest groups feature much less prominently. Further research should take their agency more seriously, as well as in empirical strategy. Potential fields of enquiry include not only the *Ost-Ausschuss*, Ruhrgas, and Mannesmann, but other stakeholders in the Soviet/Russian energy industry, including non-German companies and associations such as Dresser-Rand, Gaz de France, and British and French industrial associations. It would be particularly worthwhile to explore the public–private–partnership companies with state institutions, for example in assessing economic risk and the role of state guarantees such as the German *Hermesbürgschaften*.<sup>29</sup>

This leads to the third point, the transnational dimension of European–Soviet/Russian energy relations. The large infrastructure projects were not pursued within a national container, let alone by just one company. Pipeline construction and its financing involved different corporate and state actors across national boundaries, as in the international consortium for the construction of the Urengoy–Pomary–Uzhhorod pipeline in the early 1980s. Germany was a major player in this regard, but it was embedded in a European network of mutual interests. This collaborative effort on a corporate and political level largely remains a desideratum. Similarly, the role of countries ‘in between’ in East-Central Europe, notably Poland, the GDR, and the Baltic states, is still largely unexplored.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, U.S. interventions and their underlying geopolitical rationale deserve more attention, as does, more generally, a transatlantic relationship that involves a plethora of actors, including politicians, business executives, chambers of commerce, and industrial associations.

Fourth and final, it is striking how little the research in the fields of social science and history is connected. For example, Balmaceda explicitly pursues an interdisciplinary agenda in bringing “into dialogue insights from economics, sociology, and critical geography, in addition to political science” (p. 11).<sup>31</sup> Yet both she and Gustafson stop short of systematically integrating historiographic research into their analyses beyond a few notable exceptions such as Högselius’s “Red Gas”.<sup>32</sup> Perović and Krempin, on the other hand, employ cultural approaches that differ markedly from social scientific analysis, most visibly compared to Balmaceda’s modelling of energy chains. It remains to be seen whether the vast disciplinary differences will allow for a more productive conversation between humanities and the social sciences.

<sup>29</sup> On the role of state guarantees in German–Soviet economic relations in the interwar period, see Lutz, Martin: *Siemens im Sowjetgeschäft. Eine Institutionengeschichte der deutsch-sowjetischen Beziehungen 1917–1933* (Perspektiven der Wirtschaftsgeschichte, Vol. 1), Steiner, Stuttgart 2011, pp. 196–199.

<sup>30</sup> One notable exception is Flade: *Infrastructures* (see footnote 15).

<sup>31</sup> Balmaceda: *Chains* (see footnote 5).

<sup>32</sup> Högselius: *Gas* (see footnote 14).

As Rüdiger Graf points out, “Energy History”—or, more broadly, “Energy Humanities”—is a relatively new field of research for historians.<sup>33</sup> In the social sciences, however, energy studies is an established discipline with a number of research institutions, periodicals, and methodological perspectives. It would be beneficial if the field’s further development opened a new dialogue between humanities, the social sciences, and even the natural sciences. Such a conversation could reveal new insights concerning historical path dependencies, tipping points, critical junctures, and contingencies in the human interaction with energy. Research of that kind could place the current public and academic debate on energy dependency in a greater perspective. Combining historiographic assessment of contingency and social scientific analysis might reap benefits not just for understanding the past but also for planning the future of energy.

## 6 Reviewed Literature

- Balmaceda, Margarita M.: *Russian Energy Chains. The Remaking of Technopolitics from Siberia to Ukraine to the European Union*, 440 pp., Columbia UP, New York 2021.
- Bingener, Reinhard/Wehner, Markus: *Die Moskau-Connection. Das Schröder-Netzwerk und Deutschlands Weg in die Abhängigkeit*, 300 pp., Beck, München 2023.
- Gustafson, Thane: *The Bridge. Natural Gas in a Redivided Europe*, 520 pp., Harvard UP, Cambridge, MA/London 2020.
- Kemfert, Claudia: *Schockwellen. Letzte Chance für sichere Energien und Frieden*, 310 pp., Campus, Frankfurt a. M./New York 2023.
- Krempin, Dunja: *Die sibirische Wucht. Der Aufstieg der Sowjetunion zur globalen Gasmacht, 1964–1982*, 447 pp., Böhlau, Köln et al. 2020.
- Perović, Jeronim: *Rohstoffmacht Russland. Eine globale Energiegeschichte*, 264 pp., Böhlau, Köln et al. 2022.

**Funding** Open Access funding enabled and organized by Projekt DEAL.

**Open Access** This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article’s Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article’s Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

**Publisher’s Note** Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

---

<sup>33</sup> Graf, Rüdiger: *Energy History and Histories of Energy*, in: *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, 29 August 2023, URL: [https://docupedia.de/zg/Graf\\_energy\\_history\\_v1\\_en\\_2023](https://docupedia.de/zg/Graf_energy_history_v1_en_2023) [accessed: 15 April 2024].

**Martin Lutz** lehrt die Geschichte moderner Gesellschaften an der Universität Bielefeld. Seine Promotionschrift handelt von den deutsch-sowjetischen Beziehungen der Weimarer Republik aus der Perspektive des Unternehmens Siemens als transnationalem Akteur. Nach einer längeren Beschäftigung mit Religion im modernen Kapitalismus wendet er sich nun den deutsch-sowjetischen/russischen Wirtschaftsbeziehungen in der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts zu.