BOOK REVIEW

Trust and European-Russian Energy Relations
Ensuring Energy Security

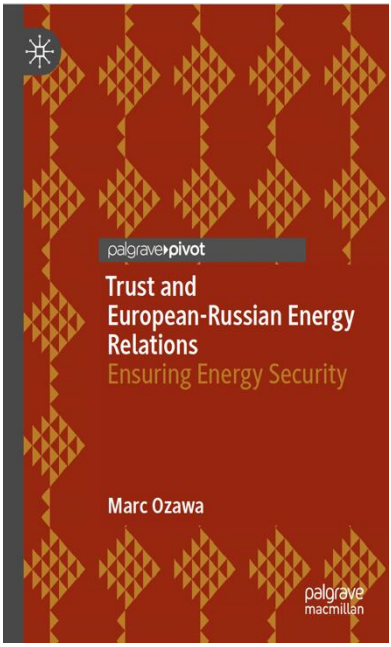
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Geopolitical and economic approaches have historically shaped the literature on energy security. The geopolitical approach highlights elements such as energy dependence, pipeline politics, and resource nationalism, while the economic approach analyzes issues through price stability, market functioning, and commercial interests. Marc Ozawa's Trust and European-Russian Energy Relations (2023), however, challenges these two dominant paradigms by assigning a central role to a frequently overlooked variable in European–Russian energy relations: trust.

The author compares Germany and Russia, and the United Kingdom and Russia, in their energy partnerships within a "most similar cases" framework, revealing how trust is built, maintained, and ultimately collapses. In particular, Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine has made a trust-based explanation of the breakdown of Europe's energy architecture even more compelling. The book's contribution to the literature, as well as its methodological and empirical analyses, provides a significant critical addition to the understanding of European energy security.

The author discusses the theoretical framework by examining the conceptualisation of trust. For this reason, he addresses three international relations approaches: the Realist Approach, the Liberal Institutional Approach, and the Sociological/Relational Approach. As a result of this literature review, he defines trust as a belief and a willingness that lead parties toward cooperation.

The book's hypotheses are as follows: first, in the initial stage of cooperation, culture, identity, and norms determine the level of trust. Second, in collectivist and high-context cultures, interactions are more relationship-oriented. Finally, the repetition of cooperation creates an environment of trust, thereby strengthening cooperation. Methodologically, the study employs the most similar cases design. In this context, Germany and the United Kingdom were selected because both are NATO members, were members of the European Union before Brexit, have industrialised economies, and are energy importers. However, the reason these similarities produced divergent outcomes in their energy relations is primarily due to differing levels of trust. The book's dataset is based on 45 semi-structured interviews conducted in 2011 and 2018, later updated in 2022. These interviews included elements such as trust levels, risk perceptions, suppliers, frequency of social interaction, and institutional support mechanisms. Trust in the study was measured through three indicators: the degree of cooperation, interpersonal relations, and political institutional statements.

The second chapter of the book provides an essential context for analysing the Germany and the United Kingdom cases. This section examines the rupture in relations between Europe and Russia caused by the 2022 war between Russia and Ukraine. The main findings are as follows: the Nord Stream sabotage marked the end of trust, and coal imports were reduced to almost zero. In addition to the collapse of commercial interdependence, trust at the political level was also damaged, and a significant portion of the European Union's sanctions targeted the energy sector. In public opinion, Russia was no longer perceived as a reliable supplier. A similar situation emerged on the Russian side as well, resulting in a loss of trust toward Europe. Russia consequently increased pressure on its energy companies and further politicised the sector.

The third chapter examines energy relations between Germany and Russia. It states that trust between the two countries was built during the Ostpolitik period. In analyzing this period, the book discusses state support mechanisms, institutional networks that strengthened personal relationships, and the uninterrupted flow of natural gas since the 1970s. Likewise, joint ventures such as Wintershall, Wingas, and Nord Stream were initiated during this period. These initiatives elevated Germany's trust in Russia from a calculus-based trust to a knowledge-based trust. Over time, this excessive trust pushed hedging strategies into the background and led to growing dependence.

The fourth chapter offers a layered analysis of why the energy relationship between the United Kingdom and Russia could not deepen and instead became increasingly fragile. Historically, the United Kingdom has perceived Russia as a low-trust partner. This stemmed from Cold War-era geopolitical mistrust, political tensions, and legal unpredictability. Incidents such as visa restrictions, forced share transfers, and intrusive police raids during the TNK-BP and Sakhalin II projects contributed to the collapse of cooperation. These developments pushed the United Kingdom to develop hedging strategies and prevented the deepening of its energy relationship with Russia.

One of the most critical sections of the chapter details how the TNK-BP partnership, built on low trust, led to a management crisis and operational breakdown. Structural differences in management cultures, legal norms, and strategic interests made the partnership increasingly vulnerable. As the situation escalated with BP executives being denied entry into Russia, office raids, visa disputes, systematic obstruction, and CEO Bob Dudley being forced to leave the country, trust collapsed entirely, and the relationship became politicised.

In the book's trust-based analytical framework, Lewicki and Stevenson's distinction among types of trust is employed: calculus-based, knowledge-based, and identity-based. The analysis shows that identity-based trust never existed within the partnership, knowledge-based trust failed to develop, and even calculus-based trust ultimately collapsed.

The same chapter also discusses Shell's Sakhalin II project, which began with high expectations but devolved into a crisis when Russia halted the project on grounds of environmental and licensing violations. For international observers, this move was interpreted as an attempt both to bring Gazprom into the project and to reduce Shell's control share. These developments deepened political and economic risk from the UK's perspective and rendered trust unsustainable in the long term.

In the conclusion, the book reiterates its core arguments, emphasizing the importance of trust in understanding and analyzing energy relations between Europe and Russia. Its most significant contribution to the literature lies in introducing trust, an often-overlooked variable in energy studies, as an explanatory factor. The author also demonstrates that the energy sector cannot be fully understood through purely economic or geopolitical frameworks. While trust ensured continuity in energy flows between Germany and Russia, distrust produced recurrent crises in the United Kingdom–Russia relationship; these dynamics are examined in detail throughout the chapters. Applying trust typologies to the European and Russian context strengthens the theoretical framework. In this regard, the cases analyzed in the study reveal the following:

Germany exhibited both calculus-based and knowledge-based trust, the United Kingdom had only weak calculus-based trust, and neither country displayed identity-based trust. The 2022 Russia–Ukraine invasion represents a significant rupture in trust, comparable to that caused by the 1973 Oil Crisis.

Although the study addresses trust within a theoretical and analytical framework, it remains limited in establishing causality. For example, questions such as "Why does trust emerge?" or "Does trust create dependence, or does dependence create trust?" are not explored in sufficient detail. The use of only two cases also limits the analysis; intermediate trust countries such as the Netherlands or Italy are not examined. Additionally, while states are analyzed throughout the book, institutions receive insufficient attention. Questions such as "Do European Union institutions produce or weaken trust?" and "What role have they played?" are not addressed.

In conclusion, trust has shaped the flow of energy between states. However, the fragility of trust and the reasons for its sudden collapse remain insufficiently analyzed. The book stands out as an innovative and illuminating contribution, yet it retains shortcomings regarding the mechanisms by which trust breaks down, the origins of trust, the influence of EU institutions, limitations of the cases, and the role of the energy transition.

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References

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