**Title: A short pipeline, a big threat – Analyzing the reasons of Russia’s firm opposition to Trans-Caspian Pipeline**



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**Abstract**

The main goal of this paper is investigating the reasons why Russia keeps opposing the implementation of the EU-favored Trans-Caspian pipeline, that would complete the so-called EU Southern Corridor of natural gas supply.

This natural gas pipeline would connect Turkmenistan, and potentially other major Central Asian producers, with Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey and finally the EU final consumers.

Given that European domestic natural gas production is expected to steadily decline during next years, EU diversification would not seriously affect Russian revenues.

This latter aspect show that the Russian Federation’s government and its monopolistic exporter Gazprom, hold additional interests in the area.

A multiple approach has been applied to the situation in order to point out the factual and potential reasons that have been leading Russia to maintain this attitude towards Central Asia and towards the EU.

The study has been given the form of a case study, whose purpose is to explain the motivation of the actors in the system to act and the character of their intertwined relationships, concentrating, above all on Russia (which has been also set as the paper’s point of view) and the EU, but taking also into account the action of third parties when, after a preliminary review, they turned out to influence to some extent the relationship between the two main partners, or, above all, they had a role in the main issue.

Both a “market and interdependence” and a “geopolitical realist” approaches were used as main explanatory tools. The study pointed out the presence of a balanced interdependence between the two main actors, that Russia strives to maintain, together with benefits deriving from it, and the EU, instead, tries to alter with a policy of diversification where Central Asia and in general the Great Caspian Sea Region holds a primary position, due to their relevant natural gas resources.

The geopolitical realist approach, on the other hand, confirmed the existence of a Russian “sphere of special interest” that the Kremlin is decided to defend from Western potential political (and possibly military) influence presumably conveyed and supported by multilateral framework for economic cooperation centered on energy, considered the importance the drilling industry and hydrocarbon distribution holds in Central Asian countries’ economy.

Another noteworthy finding of this study is the growing strategic polarization of international relations around the alliance between U.S and EU on one side and Russia with China on the other, although these last two have to clearly define their respective boundaries concerning influence in Central Asia. The present configuration of IR tends to exclude the emergence of conflicts between the two “blocks” however if the trend continues, the management of Great Caspian Sea Region could be the winning factor to achieve the primacy over the strategic opponent.

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# 1. Introduction

Is the Caspian a sea, or is it a lake? What may sound like a simple matter of points of view brings along, instead, very significant economic and political questions.

The status of the Caspian waters gives much more the idea of a geopolitical issue where the defence of national interest is at stake, rather than a sterile academic dispute over international law norms and definitions.

Among the Caspian coastal states, Russia and Iran argue that the Caspian should be considered as a large lake, being “a body of water from which there is no egress, while smaller state actors like Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan sustain the hypothesis of “inland see”[[1]](#footnote-1).

Predictably, if one of the two positions was to be unanimously accepted, then it would bring about very different outcomes. In the first case, in fact, all coastal states would have “equal rights to the use of the water”, that also mean the possibility of vetoing unilateral projects in the common area, where otherwise “each state would control the waters off its coast”, in accordance with the customary regime of international waters[[2]](#footnote-2).

It has to be underlined that the European idea of a Trans-Caspian pipeline is not a novelty in the international scenery and has also been often mentioned as an alternative supply option in academic papers and in political discussions since the break-up of the USSR, when Central Asian states obtained full sovereignty over their hydrocarbon resources[[3]](#footnote-3).

After a period of relative indifference, the question has been in recent times reinserted with renewed hopes in the EU and Turkmenistan’s agendas, in conjunction with a set of noteworthy happenings.

As we will see, 1) the 2006 and 2009 gas disputes between Gazprom and Ukraine have brought out a question in EU security of supply and a perceived need for diversification of providers, while, at the same time, 2) the new president of Turkmenistan, Mr. Berdimuhammedov, first “post-soviet-generation leader” in Central Asian countries, has demonstrated to strive for a much more pragmatic and open export policy than his predecessor[[4]](#footnote-4), even in open conflict with Russian views.

Similar examples of offshore pipelines, like the Northern Sea network, the Blue Stream, or the more recent Nord Stream and South Stream show beyond any doubt that, by now, the difficulty of connecting the two Caspian shores may be anything but a problem related to technology. Also the environmental issue claimed by the Russian government to hinder the implementation of TCP does not have solid grounding if other successful, though more risky, projects in Eurasia are examined. [[5]](#footnote-5)

On the other hand, it would be an oversimplification to state that the fact Turkmenistan (and possibly, Uzbekistan) have the potential to “take one third of Gazprom’s business” is the only concern for Russia.[[6]](#footnote-6) In fact, provided that implementing a full-fledged EU Southern Corridor will take time, in the current condition of growing global demand there would be plenty of time for Gazprom and Russia to adequate their export strategy and to re-establish a satisfactory level of security of demand.

The political and geopolitical relevance of the “EU’s straw into Central Asia” becomes even more clear in the light of the 2011 interview released by Konstantin Simonov, director general of the Russian National Energy Security Fund. Mr. Simonov, referring to the pipeline at hand, notably expressed his strongest doubts about the fact that “Russia is ready to tolerate such an outright move of disrespect”, adding that “Turkmenistan, despite the support from Washington and Brussels, is not ready to risk yet. I am very doubtful that Russia will tolerate it. Moreover, the reaction can be very hard up to some sort of military conflict in the Caspian Sea.”[[7]](#footnote-7) The growing and more organised naval presence both on the Turkmen and Russian sides[[8]](#footnote-8), only seems to confirm the political stance in regard to the project.

Keeping these considerations in mind, the purpose of this paper is exactly that of trying to point out what the real underlying reasons for Russia can be to oppose the TCP project so fiercely that even the open threat of using hard power is allegedly taken into account.

As to the content, the present work consists in an in-depth investigation of current energy relations in Eurasia (focusing on Russia, the EU and on the so-called “Great Caspian Sea Region”), ultimately in order to provide a comprehensive explanation of the potential impact of the TCP on the status quo and its implications in terms of interdependence and security relations.

# 2. Background and justification of research scope

17.5 trillion cubic metres of proved reserves or 9.3% of world’s total[[9]](#footnote-9). These data are referred only to Turkmenistan. Actually, as a whole, the region M. E. Biresselioglu (2011) refers to as Greater Caspian Sea region stores in its subsoil enormous gas reserves which make it “the major alternative in terms of natural gas for the global energy market”[[10]](#footnote-10).

The GCS region, in virtue of its significant resources, but also for “a combination of political, economic and geostrategic reasons” has been arising as a very important question in international relations.[[11]](#footnote-11) That is why I need to provide a concise but precise definition, also in order to make it easier for the reader to understand the general context on which the analysis concentrates.

In his study, by GCS, Biresselioglu wants to include in a single system not only the countries located on the Caspian Sea’s shores, but also the other neighbouring state actors that are “strongly affected by the energy regime there as producers, as consumers and as transit ways”.[[12]](#footnote-12) The list therefore has to be integrated, according to the author, with Iraq, Uzbekistan, Georgia and Turkey without which, it would be hard to fully understand the geopolitical dynamics in the area.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Noting that “EU energy situation is still unsustainable, non-competitive and increasingly dependent on imports”[[14]](#footnote-14), also because domestic production in particular in UK and Netherlands is declining[[15]](#footnote-15) and Norwegian production has almost reached its “plateau phase”[[16]](#footnote-16), it is understandable that for the EU GCS is viewed as a potential good partner to sustain with its exports EU’s future growth.



Figura 1 EIA World Energy Outlook 2010

Furthermore, the EU is interested in diversifying as much as possible since, it will be illustrated in further details, this is one of the most relevant factors to enhance energy security.

I find that the GCS region concept not only has the merit of providing a unique framework able to give account of tight cultural, economic and political links, but is also very useful in my case to investigate the competing energy interest in the area from Russia’s perspective, itself a Caspian “shareholder”. I will actually have to pay only relative attention to Iran and Iraq, due to their currently complicated political situation and international status.

The purpose of this paragraph is to give the necessary basic background information for further analysis. To begin with, an outline is provided of how the system of relations between the considered actors is currently structured and how the system would change if the EU somehow was able to enter this market bypassing Russia.

To visualize at a glance the configuration of present international gas-trade relationships pivoted on Russia, I recommend to look at the diagram below.



Russia, the “protagonist” of my case study, according to EIA is the second-largest producer of dry natural gas with the largest proved reserves in the world[[17]](#footnote-17). Predictably, its economy is highly reliant on mining and drilling industry, accounting in fact on hydrocarbons (oil and natural gas) for more than 50% of the federal budget revenues[[18]](#footnote-18). Even with the current production rhythm, proved reserves of natural gas will last for at least 55 years[[19]](#footnote-19), however, almost the entirety of Russian export are at the moment diverted only to EU countries plus Turkey[[20]](#footnote-20). Russia is marked in red as it is the cornerstone of the scheme, while in a blue frame, I put in evidence the other relevant trading actors in the system, both producers and consumers. Eventually I included in the system also transit states (in orange) since, for better or for worse, when dealing with pipelines, transit state, always represent an important variable to consider.

Red lines symbolize capital flows (usually resulting from long-term supply contracts), while blue lines indicate the actual natural gas supply route.

The “functional” system then becomes even more meaningful if associated to a pipeline map that shows the geographical location and route of pipelines stylized in my previous scheme.



Figura 2 East European Gas Analysis, 2014

This system has to be subdivided into three main parts which should be briefly examined separately.

The trade between Russian Federation and EU countries is the most relevant in terms of volumes exchanged every year and it also has the particularity of embodying an interesting case of very high energy interdependence between the two countries. Russia exports the bulk of its surplus to EU members (Germany 24%, Italy 11%, UK 6%, France 6%, other western European countries 10 %)[[21]](#footnote-21) and until the end of 2011 all of gas flow had to cross Ukraine and Belarus[[22]](#footnote-22), since these pipelines heading from Western Siberian super-giant fields were built under the Soviet Union when there were no state borders or competing national interests with Moscow.

To remedy the blow to its reputation as a reliable supplier originated form disputes with the mentioned transit states, Russia made pressure on European partners (state and main companies) to set up Nord and South Stream pipelines, the former for north-central Europe countries, mainly Germany, and the second for Balkans and south-central Europe[[23]](#footnote-23) [[24]](#footnote-24). The former has already started operating in September 2011, the latter is foreseen to start delivering at the end of 2015. As it can be seen on the map above, both of these new international pipelines transit to a great extent in international waters and emerge respectively in Germany and Bulgaria, within the EU borders.

The second tranche of the system outline is about Turkey. Turkey is also one of Russia’s top customers, mainly due to geographical proximity and the nearly total absence of hydrocarbons deposits in its territory[[25]](#footnote-25). The majority of Russian exports are carried by the Blue Stream pipeline across the Black Sea, that together with the BTE (Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum) pipeline bringing Azeri natural gas, covers the overwhelming majority of Turkish demand[[26]](#footnote-26).

Azerbaijan was renown as an oil producer already during the Russian empire[[27]](#footnote-27), but has been instead a net gas importer until the BP-operated Shah Deniz field was discovered in 2009 and enable the country to export at operating capacity to Georgia and Turkey[[28]](#footnote-28). Its moderate production of 15.6 bcm/year[[29]](#footnote-29) (2012) gives a very valuable contribution to diversification of Georgia and Turkey, however it is not enough yet to feed alone an international pipeline like the Nabucco. This is one of the reasons why this long-debated project was replaced by an integrated TCP-TANAP-TAP (Trans-Caspian Pipeline - Trans-Anatolian Pipeline - Trans-Adriatic Pipeline) able to carry Turkmen and Azeri output to Greece, Italy and further.[[30]](#footnote-30)

It is also true that further exploration of Shah Deniz field may boost Azerbaijan potential[[31]](#footnote-31), that might in the long term compensate probable growing Turkmen exports directed to China which might absorb a large percentage of its own production.

The last section of my scheme is the link between Turkmenistan and to some extent Uzbekistan as a producer and Russia, this time as a buyer.

Until 2009, when the Central Asia-China pipeline become operational, the sole major importer of Turkmen and Uzbek gas was Russia through the Soviet era Central Asia-Centre long-range pipeline, if we do not count the minor import from the northern provinces of Iran. Russia in fact “acquires Central Asian and Caspian energy, in particular gas, in order to re-export it”[[32]](#footnote-32). Russia could gain a lot from using cheap Central Asian price for its domestic market, divert it to CIS countries at a favourable rate or purchase and sell it to third parties at market prices[[33]](#footnote-33)while being able to control the exploitation of Central Asian national resources[[34]](#footnote-34). Actually the situation changed a lot, the competition in the area sensibly raised and from then Gazprom agreed to buy progressively larger supplies from Turkmenistan even at European prices in exchange of being the sole exporter to extra-CIS countries.[[35]](#footnote-35)This incentive to maintain a “single export channel”, following Putin’s call in 2002 for an “Eurasian Gas Producers’ Alliance” might be seen as an effort to re-integration rather than some sort of “dominion”[[36]](#footnote-36), but the wish to keep CIS compact to prevent a Western penetration is anyway also plain.

Since Uzbekistan has remarkable proved reserves which amount to 1.1 tcm[[37]](#footnote-37) and it is well connected to neighbouring state as also to longer international networks, an explanation is due about the fact it has been put into brackets in the scheme above. The main problem affecting Uzbek status in the energy market is its short-sighted strategy; it keeps a clearly over-boosted production ratio (56.9 bcm/year) while consuming the bulk of it (47.9 bcm/year)[[38]](#footnote-38) to satisfy a very high internal demand which denotes in turn a too undifferentiated national energy mix, other than being motivated by the fact Uzbekistan has the largest population in the area.[[39]](#footnote-39)

Uzbekistan, can therefore continue to export significant amount of natural gas, but with this pace, only in the short period; To quantify how short this period might be, BP R/P ratio should be taken as reference and, with current production rhythm it will only take about 17 years before existing fields are depleted[[40]](#footnote-40). Uzbekistan is thus indicated in such a way, to underline its significance but at the same time its long-term low strategic relevance.

Ultimately, Kazakhstan is also a producer, but I decided to look at it mostly just as a transit state since it also resulted quite irrelevant to the ends of my analysis, that is on the possible evolution of the east-west gas route. Kazakhstan, despite its significant gas reserves, decidedly keep considering oil production as the real priority, while natural gas production over the past decade has been largely used in function of oil recovery by re-injecting it into oil reservoirs and in order to reduce Kazakhstan's reliance on natural gas imports[[41]](#footnote-41). Another main reason for the underdevelopment of gas exploitation and use (only 14% in the national energy mix, compared to 19% of oil and 64% of coal) is the very immature state of Kazak domestic gas pipeline infrastructure, unable so far to connect the “western producing region with the eastern industrial region, as well as the lack of export pipelines”[[42]](#footnote-42). In summary, then, Kazakhstan can be a potential natural gas exporter but only in the long-term; at the moment it must be essentially viewed as a transit state. If economic and political condition change unexpectedly in the near future, it is anyway geographically close enough to link its Caspian gas fields to a Trans-Caspian Pipeline running from Turkmenistan, or directly to the opposite shore, in Azerbaijan.

To conclude this paragraph, it is possible now to understand how the implementation of a fully-fledged “Southern Corridor” able to bypass Russia will change the current balance of relation between the states. It would 1) take a consistent share of the highly profitable European market to Russia 2) it would undermine Gazprom’s (Russia’s) control on Central Asian exports to Europe and ultimately 3) it would predictably enhance cooperation and interdependence between the states along the pipeline.

# 3. Problem Formulation

I used the previous paragraphs to illustrate the present system of natural gas international trade relations between Russia, the EU and the GCS region, and I also pointed out how natural gas as a commodity holds and will increasingly hold in the future great importance for economies worldwide and in particular in Europe (both in the EU countries and in Europe broadly considered). In this section I need to concisely explain what my paper is going to look into, formulating a precise research question and stressing what the factors and contradictions that make the case worth special attention are.

Reviewing the literature about Euro-Russian energy relations and energy security it is hard not to notice the tendency by scholars to concentrate mainly on the European side. Frequent references are in fact made to the need on the one hand for diversification, integration and liberalisation, and on the other hand, to the difficulties of “speaking with a single voice” in energy negotiations with Russia through the European Commission as sole negotiator.

I would like instead to reverse the perspective and try to look at the issue “from the Kremlin”; in this way I assume my paper will be able to point out key patterns of behaviour of the European strategic natural gas trading partner par excellence, Russia.

In an effort to formulate a clear but comprehensive problem, my main question throughout the paper is going to be the following: **“What are the underlying real reasons for Russia to try to prevent the EU from obtaining direct access to Central Asian natural gas resources?”**

The fact Russian government, every time that proposals or discussion about the implementation of a Trans-Caspian pipeline are made, deliberately hinder any progress expressing environmental concerns or appealing to the unresolved legal status of the Caspian Sea[[43]](#footnote-43), should be interpreted in my opinion as a simple diplomatic pretext not to openly declare that such a change in the market and geopolitical setting clashes in some way with Russian national interest.

Taken this for granted, I will move the attention to the main focus of the paper, attempting to understand whether Russia is simply acting to preserve its export outflow to Europe, or instead whether Central Asian and Caspian resources are (also) somehow intertwined with foreign policy strategy and with altering/maintaining the status quo in the “Russian backyard”. While answering the “why” question, I will also give account of “how” this has been made possible, since I see a contradiction in the lack of action by the EU with the persistent calls upon members, by European leaders and papers backing them, to strive for greater diversification of supply and overcome overdependence on Russian export.

In order to research the causes of Russia’s behaviour, that I assume to be deducible and to have a relevant impact on geopolitical equilibria, the paper will take the form of a case study. Practically speaking, I will test the explanatory power of a set of different theories, which, anyway, in the end will be recomposed in a coherent system of analysis, that, as I am going to explain in further detail in the methodology part, will serve as a basis on which verifying the initial assumptions and deriving precise academic conclusions and policy considerations.

A closing remark must be made about the actors I mention in the problem formulation. Here Russia and EU are comprehensive expressions, that will be used in different acceptation during the analysis, in general to indicate the two sides of the geopolitical “game” of energy relations; for example they can also represent the geographic space under the control of central government(s) or national companies operating in gas supply in EU countries like Gazprom as Russia’s export monopolist. It is to this end important to stress that, unless specified, Russia will stand for Russian government and EU instead for EU member states’ governments.

Furthermore, and very important, it must be specified that although in the research question only Russia and the EU are mentioned, this does not in any way mean I will only focus on these two actors, but rather I will take also in consideration the influence and the interests of third active parts, as long as their policy or influence can contribute in coming up with an explanation for the main problem.

## 3.1 Focus on the natural gas market

In this first section of delimitation I am going to clarify the reasons why I decided to restrict the field of analysis exclusively to natural gas and therefore to exclude other energy commodities, first of all oil, notwithstanding the importance they certainly have in the European energy mix, in relation to Russia-EU relationship and their competing interests in the Caspian basin. The European commissioner for Energy himself stated that although “Gas is playing a central role in the EU economy” and “It makes up some 24% in EU energy (overall) consumption”, therefore considering demand related to industry, households and transport, it is anyway “in second place after oil”[[44]](#footnote-44), which is still the most used energy commodity. EU domestic energy production (46.9% in 2007) covers in fact less than half of its needs and accounted on oil for 60% of total energy commodities import (26% natural gas and 16% solid fuels, mainly hard coal)[[45]](#footnote-45).

On the other hand, “Russia was the world's third-largest producer of oil (after Saudi Arabia and the United States) with average production at 10.5 million barrels per day (bbl/d) through September 2013” while “It was the second-largest producer of natural gas in 2012 (second to the United States)”.[[46]](#footnote-46) Also export conditions of Russian oil and gas are similar to a certain degree; in both cases the flux to Europe is almost exclusively carried through the pipeline network which is fed by state-owned monopolists, Transneft for oil and Gazprom for natural gas. However internal competition for oil drilling and distribution is much higher for oil than for gas, where Gazprom has direct control over the 65% of proven reserves and produce the 74% out of the total.[[47]](#footnote-47)

I do not cast any doubt on the fact that researching on oil trading would be a very good approach to geopolitical and strategic issues concerning Eurasia, however, having to cope with space and time constraint a blunt choice is necessary between the two. The grounds of my focus on gas are motivated by the higher political and strategic relevance of the latter, both in a global scale and in Eurasia.

As mentioned above, forecasts in fact predict a substantial growth of global demand and usage of natural gas in the next two decades while oil demand parameters will remain high, but fundamentally close to stationary[[48]](#footnote-48).



This switch is predominantly due to environmental policies which urge upon developed countries to rely much more on gas in all sectors, in virtue of its minor impact, and as we know the EU is at the forefront in fighting greenhouse gas emissions.[[49]](#footnote-49)

Logically proceeding, in absence of new major reserves discovery, lively global demand growth means geopolitical competition to get most advantageous resources and a redefinition of strategies, interests and policies in a faster way than in a condition of unvaried demand.

Moreover, oil is more easily and inexpensively storable and transportable than LNG[[50]](#footnote-50) (see the next session for more reflections on this issue) which make it, in turn, easier for countries to differentiate the supply or to manage contingent disruptions. We can therefore derive that the suspension or limitation of the production of a producer country is more likely to raise index prices than tangibly affect a country’s security and economy with almost immediate consequences like in the Ukraine gas dispute of 2009[[51]](#footnote-51). If the implementation of Nord Stream and South Stream pipelines are expected to avoid the reoccurrence of such emergencies, the situation just recalled is anyway a good example to understand how in general natural gas can directly affect the condition of citizens.

Aiming to pointing out what the interests of Russia are in a determinate area, Central Asia, some further brief considerations about the countries involved are due, too.

The holders of greatest proven reserves in the Caspian Basin are Kazakhstan for Oil and Turkmenistan for natural gas.[[52]](#footnote-52) The former, especially after the refusal by Russia to directly export oil to Europe using its pipeline network, on the ground of energy policy, has decidedly turned to China, where it found a reliable long-term strategic partner and an outlet eager to absorb its production surplus[[53]](#footnote-53). I do not see therefore any room for the implementation of ambitious projects with Europe now.

Turkmenistan which is instead very rich in natural gas[[54]](#footnote-54) seems to be the priority target for European companies, supported by governmental agencies, probably also in connection with the strategic importance of gas explained above.

Actually there is one last reason to prefer an approach to my research limited to natural gas; it is hard to overlook in fact the massive share of power, 56%, that Russia obtains from natural gas combustion.[[55]](#footnote-55) Provided that for many year the only significant Turkmenistan’s (and Uzbekistan’s) export line was the soviet-time Central Asia – Centre (CAC) pipeline[[56]](#footnote-56), the role of Turkmen gas in Russia’s internal policy and energy strategy has to be investigated since it is also a very promising path to define whether geopolitical interest in this specific country goes beyond the simple loss of potential supply to European partners.

## 3.2 Exclusion of shale gas and LNG variables

During the last few years, after the U.S. began to largely rely upon non-conventional gas and made it possible to drastically decrease domestic prices and import shares, interest also in Europe has been rising about following the American example by launching internal shale production[[57]](#footnote-57) or, as an alternative, about importing shale gas from the U.S. on LNG (liquefied natural gas) carriers[[58]](#footnote-58).

Recently, in conjunction with re-emerging frictions between the U.S. and Russia, concrete hypotheses have been made in this direction on the two shores of the Atlantic.

I should explain in brief the reasons why I decided to exclude these variables from my paper. My choice was not due, this time, to a need for simplifying the case at hand, but it is rather a reasoned exclusion. After reviewing literature and the most recent opinions on the topic, I can say I also agree that non-conventional sources of natural gas cannot in the foreseeable future engender any remarkable modification of the current European energy mix, or even somehow directly affect Russian export to European countries.

Since forecasts about the impact of a conjectural LNG export from the USA to Europe are not at the core of my research I will not investigate further than it is necessary to prove that the Euro-Russian interdependence will be a lasting condition that, indeed, represents a crucial element in the effort of understanding and describing energy relations in the Eurasian continent.

To begin with I will provisionally set aside non-conventional gas and focus only on LNG transportation. It should be noted that LNG is a relatively aged technology which has been so far relegated to a minority share in natural gas trade movements, mainly as a consequence of its very high processing costs which make it a profitable supply option only over very long distances.[[59]](#footnote-59)

The same aspect has been also stressed by the European Commission in 2009, which deem affordability is LNG’s major problem, since “LNG projects are among the most expensive and technically complicated energy projects. Coupled with the likely predominance of supply over demand in the foreseeable future, if the EU chooses to go for a large contribution of LNG to meet its overall gas demand, EU customers will most likely face higher prices for gas. Price affordability may become a key issue when taking the political and investment decisions on LNG”.[[60]](#footnote-60)

Of course it is a valuable possibility for differentiating the supply, also in virtue of the fact that LNG, being transported by ship, is not subject to fixed routes and makes it possible, in contrast to pipelines, to quickly change providers/customers if market or political conditions take an unexpected turn. For example, Baltic countries, which have so far relied upon Russian gas for the totality or for a great share of their supply, are now striving to invest on LNG facilities and put an end to the monopoly held by their big neighbour.[[61]](#footnote-61) Anyway, this is fully understandable only from the point of view of security and the re-emerging Ukraine crisis (after the same countries were heavily hit by 2006 and 2009 gas disputes), together with the constantly tense political relations between Baltic republics plus Poland with Russia.[[62]](#footnote-62)

Pro-LNG analysts argue that the restart of Japanese nuclear power plants will soon drastically shrink Asian demand making LNG exports generally cheaper in a short time.[[63]](#footnote-63)

The underlying rationale is in principle right, but I wish to remark that when taking into consideration a longer period (normally to 2035-2040) it is very likely that this strategy will prove to be short-sighted. BP’s outlook to 2035 shows how non-OECD and especially China will make the global demand for gas grow steadily in the next years, incidentally, while middle eastern countries will also have to cope with a sensibly higher domestic consumption, which will plausibly decrease the area’s export.[[64]](#footnote-64)

New key players will progressively appear in the LNG market in addition to US, primarily Australia and African countries that will make the offer rise, together with the share covered by LNG vis-a vis pipeline in the global market. Nevertheless, the latter will likely maintain its primacy, notably in Europe were also according to BP forecasts, either imported LNG nor indigenous unconventional sources will make up for the decreasing domestic production.[[65]](#footnote-65)

The case of Baltic states, after all, should be regarded just as an exception to the rule that LNG trade is more influenced by financial factors than political ones, which lead to assume that the price is the decisive element in signing LNG agreements, more than with pipelines. A confirmation of this tendency comes from the fact that the Gulf gas, normally exported to US until the rising of fracking, has been mostly diverted to Asia rather than to Europe, for the simple reason that Asian customers are willing to pay higher prices than the average.

In case LNG trade from the USA to Europe became hypothetically viable, it has been shown that prices are expected to rise significantly and would equal Gazprom’s offer; in other words that would discourage the two parts in investing heavily in new structures for liquefaction/regasification and a carrier fleet. I think the head of American Cheniere Energy had this in mind when he declared that “it is an excess to assume that US shale gas could have an impact into diversifying European reliance from Russian gas”[[66]](#footnote-66).

It could be argued that European Union countries may start implementing non-conventional gas extraction projects in their territories, since, “according to preliminary and theoretical researches” large reserves have been discovered, especially in Poland and Romania.[[67]](#footnote-67)

Actually, even without lingering on the huge ongoing debate about environmental risk connected to the fracking practice[[68]](#footnote-68), and the probable related mobilization of powerful environmental lobbies and NIMBY associations around Europe to oppose such projects, I think the best way to exclude a major influence of an alleged “shale revolution” in Europe is to stick to pricing issues. Looking at the American situation and basing my remarks on a recent paper by a Sciences Po team I can restate for my purposes that the steep decrease of US natural gas prices was caused by a set of short-term factors (like limited export capacity and inelastic gas consumption) while "Longer-term expectations of production costs for shale is situated closer to 6-10 $/MBtu” and “the high end of this prediction is close to Gazprom's European prices.”[[69]](#footnote-69) Provided that European trends would not apparently be different, it sounds like President Vladimir Putin was far-sighted when he affirmed that “he did not see much in the way of serious change for the global gas market”.[[70]](#footnote-70)

In a nutshell, this paragraph was aimed at justifying the exclusion of LNG and shale variables from the focus of my research since, according to current data and forecast, they are not going to be able to supplant Russian pipelined gas in the period until 2035.

European countries are in some cases evidently going to pay the price of differentiating and enhancing their security, but in general energy relation between Russia and Europe will continue to be a major issue when assessing the level of energy security and strategic policies in the two parts; LNG, shale and other unconventional sources will not affect significantly the scale of the relationship between the two partners at hand.

# 4. Methodology

## 4.1 Research Design and method applied

Keeping the problem formulation in mind, this section is conceived to answer questions such as how the research is going to proceed, how theories have been chosen and are going to be applied, or what the ultimate goal of this paper is in terms of generalization.

In the introductory part and in my problem formulation I have hopefully given a satisfactory overview of my research scope, which has been conceived to be broad enough to take two main different perspectives to examine the case 1) the importance of Central Asia for Russia because included in its perceived sphere of influence, threatened by a possible intrusion of Europe with the pretext of gas trading or 2) the potential impact of Central Asian resources in the interdependence relationship between EU and Russia, which keep playing the difficult role of balancing important relations with EU with relations (or desired influence) in Central Asia.

Considered the importance of the energy sector in Russian economy, even though it would be unfortunately impossible to analyse in depth the relevance of natural gas trading for the development of domestic economy and the stability of the political establishment, not to run the risk of going off topic, I plead with the reader for a slight effort of logics and assume that growing revenues in a major strategic sector like it is in our case, are directly and positively related to Russia’s good economic performance and the popularity of its governmental apparatus. Proceeding in this way, the paper is based on a sort of theoretical triangle whose vertexes are Russia (domestic politics and point of view for the analysis)-European importers- Great Caspian sea Region where Russian Government and Gazprom try to maintain their position. In order to reduce complexity, the scope should be subdivided in parts, however, my purpose is to be able to recompose them eventually in a unique and coherent system capable of pointing out how the different “parts” of the problem interact together. Of course, despite the fact that Gazprom is a state-owned company, I admit the possibility that its interest might be to some extent divergent, or conflicting with the political thrusts of Russian establishment.

Such an approach to the problem led me to structure my research as a case study.

With the words of George and Bennett (2005) a case study is defined as a “well-defined aspect of a historical episode that the investigator selects for analysis, rather than a historical event itself”[[71]](#footnote-71). It must be said that the world case is often interpreted as “ a phenomenon for which we report and interpret only a single measure on any pertinent variable”; this entails that a case would be based on a single observation on the independent variable connected with many dependent variable, and therefore it would suffer from an “inherent problem of indeterminacy or an inability to choose among competing explanation for a case” .[[72]](#footnote-72)

By now it should be clear that my purpose is precisely to take into account competing explanation to describe the system of relation introduced in the problem formulation, and therefore I strongly agree with Sprinz and Wolinsky-Nahmias when they affirm that “each case […] has a potential number of observations on intervening variables and may allow several qualitative measures of various dimensions of the independent and dependent variables” in order to avoid the risk of indeterminacy.[[73]](#footnote-73)

Furthermore, I want to stress that it is not my intention to carry out a real “theory testing process”, with the goal of identifying “whether and how the scope conditions of competing theories should be explained or narrowed”[[74]](#footnote-74)neither to “develop new theories or fill the gaps in existing ones”[[75]](#footnote-75), but rather to make use of well-developed theories, with a sound explanatory power, in order to explain the “class of events” I have chosen to examine, that is, reformulating the problem formulation, the strategic interests connected with Central Asian resources that Russia aims to protect are.

Therefore, as an explanation study, I can say my paper will tend to be a so-called “clinical case study”[[76]](#footnote-76), where the use of theories serves to explain the case at hand and where my unit of analysis[[77]](#footnote-77) are the vital interests that may justify an opposition to European access to Central Asian energy market.

I assume that with such premises it is already clear I will not make any effort to come to any generalisation out of conclusions, since I invite the reader to look at the case in question as unique and hardly replicable in different geopolitical contexts. The present should be therefore considered almost exclusively a policy-oriented research.

As far as the method applied is concerned, I opted for a deductive process which means that most applicable theories are identified in first place and then applied to the specific case.

Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff Jr (2004) describe the deductive method essentially as a two-step process which begins with choosing an abstract concept, model or a basic presumption, extracted from a set of definitions which were themselves gathered through experience and appliance of individual wisdom rather than being resultant from systematically collected empirical proof. The following step is, for the researcher, to deduct/excerpt relevant applications and conclusions making use his/her logical-rational thinking[[78]](#footnote-78).

In conclusion, I also support these authors’ view when they describe deduction as a “formal” process aimed to generating hypotheses out of logically integrated broader concepts, axioms or presumptions to test them in a second moment against carefully chosen findings rather than impressionistic data[[79]](#footnote-79).

## 4.2 Literature studies and data collection method

On the score of my research method, time and resources constraint and also the fact that a relevant part of the material used already came from sources of renown reliability, I deemed it inappropriate to carry out comprehensive either qualitative or quantitative research to obtain information or data on site.

In particular, acquiring information through further interviews, due to the high professional level of the potential target, would have required significant efforts to produce, in the end, a negligible perspective advancement.

Being normally case studies based essentially on qualitative method, it is generally accepted that words take the precedence over quantitative data.[[80]](#footnote-80) For this reason, as a source of primary and secondary data, mostly scientific literature has been used throughout the paper, in the form of books, articles, surveys and statistical reports issued by organizations of recognized merit.

Websites must be mentioned too, since they had the noteworthy advantage of providing very up-to-date information, indispensable while treating themes in the field of energy resources exploitation and trading. Looking at the bibliography, It can be noticed in fact, that in a number of occasions I resorted to online newspapers (both specialized in energy matters and more general ones). To this end, I should underline that I did it only as extrema ratio when I could not retrieve the needed information from any other more rigorous scientific source, that I searched among the most trustworthy international publications or news agencies reports, and yet, that I included them with the awareness of the lower academic relevance of such sources, giving the priority to books and articles.

In addition, I strived to found my approach on very strong theoretical bases, derived, on the one hand, from some piece of classical IR literature like “Power and Interdependence” by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, and on the other hand on recent texts focused on energy issues, published by outstanding publishing houses and reported in many other articles’ bibliographies. I must notably mention “European Energy Security: Turkey's Future Role and Impact” by Mehmet Efe Biresselioglu and “European Energy Security: Analyzing the EU-Russia Energy Security Regime in Terms of Interdependence Theory” by Natalia Esakova, that were particularly inspiring both in theories description and as a source of reliable data, to which the direct access in several case would have been otherwise difficult to get.

In regards to this latter aspects, I am perfectly aware that extrapolating original qualitative data interpretation by another researcher may turn out to be risky, due to a possible distortion of original meaning mainly as a result of the influence of personal values, and the abstraction from the concept where the original assertion was included. This is the reason why, when available I have always given precedence to primary sources.

In spite of my efforts to ensure a treatment of data and other authors’ interpretations with as much detachment as my current academic capabilities allow me, I want to stress that in any case I share the conviction that the practical impossibility of obtaining a result close to mathematical objectivity is, in all studies conducted with a deductive design, not necessarily a shortcoming.

If in fact in a well-structured inductive research the study will show relations between facts and situations with a very high degree of probability and impartiality[[81]](#footnote-81), nevertheless, beyond accurate causal data and associations, the researcher will not be able to entirely understand and explain them, important implication, this one, that would jeopardize the ultimate goal of a clinical case study like mine, that is, for all intents and purposes its explanatory character.

# 5. Theoretical framework

## 5.1 The concept of Energy Security

To open this chapter, whose function is that of illustrating the theories applied to this case, I think the most logical choice to make for the sake of the clarity and utility of the theoretical framework, is to begin by defining the concept of energy security.

Energy security has gradually become a very popular expression, used, especially in the political language, often just to refer vaguely to energy policy or to call for a higher level of diversification of supplies.

It has been argued that it is not easy to come up with a comprehensive and generally accepted definition of energy security, given that it generally assumes different meanings to different people at different moments in time.[[82]](#footnote-82)

This concept is a very complex one and since it has very high relevance in my research, it is necessary to operationalize it and duly explain its sub-concepts together with the related indicators, maintaining however a qualitative approach.

Energy security as an academic issue gained popularity among international relations scholars in the aftermath of 1973-74 oil-crises, when it became clear that oil is a scarce resource and that a cut or a sudden reduction of supplies can have visible effects also on regular citizens, shifting from the previous paradigm focused on energy security as a factor almost exclusively concerning military affairs.[[83]](#footnote-83)

Not only the OPEC crisis of the 70s was the spark that urged for the recognition of energy security as a key policy issue, but also encouraged the beginning of a widespread confrontation between the mainstream IR schools, involving high-rank academics such as R. O. Keohane, J.S. Nye, Robert Gilpin, Dennis Meadows or Hans Morgenthau[[84]](#footnote-84). Each of them started looking at the newborn energy question predictably through a different theoretical lens, from the realist approach underlying the possibility of using oil as a tool of foreign policy, to the Nye and Keohane’s interdependence approach, where power was seen as the result of asymmetries in international relationships based on trading interdependency.[[85]](#footnote-85) However one thing is sure, already back then it became suddenly clear that energy had become intimately intertwined with “regular” international and domestic politics.

Although it would be interesting to examine how the concept at hand evolved from the 70s oil crisis until nowadays, it does not fall into the scope of this paper and, due to space constraint, attention should be rather drawn to the contemporary understanding of energy security.

Energy security, after losing its appeal as a high-priority governmental agenda item during the 90s, mostly as a result of low commodity prices and oversupply of oil[[86]](#footnote-86), it has returned to be regarded as a strategic matter in the 2000s as a consequence of the demand shock of these years. This resulted in a sharp and steady global price increase, caused by the dramatic growth in Asian countries, together with the contemporary exit from international markets of large producers such as Iraq and Libya (due to inner conflicts) or the embargo hitting Iran, and eventually the renaissance of Russia as a regional power.[[87]](#footnote-87) Apart from all these factors, also a growing orientation towards “resource nationalism” and towards the nationalization of foreign-owned assets (or re-nationalization in regard to Russia) has taken shape, most visibly in Russia and Venezuela.[[88]](#footnote-88)

Provided that natural gas prices are to a great extent still coupled with oil prices in long-term supply contracts, the pick of 150$/barrel touched in 2008 brought along also natural gas. As I mentioned before, in the field of natural gas, the two disputes between Russian Gazprom and Ukraine in 2006 and 2008 added yet another problematic question to an already complicated and competitive global environment.

In brief, conditions nowadays have deeply changed from the 70s but also from the 80s or 90s, and not only in the energy market but also in the system of international relations with which energy trading and security endeavors interact. If for David Deese the concept of energy security, in 1979, could be defined as “a condition in which a country perceives high probability that it will have adequate energy supplies at affordable prices” where affordable meant they did not have the potential to affect negatively and severely normal social activities,[[89]](#footnote-89) today such a definition for a number of reason is both obsolete and reductive. It tends to mirrors in fact an old-fashioned view of energy issues; energy security here means in other words “handling of any disruption of oil supplies from countries producing at a reasonable price”[[90]](#footnote-90).

To begin with, after reading the delimitation paragraph above, it should be evident that oil does not have a monopolistic role in shaping states’ energy strategy anymore, but notably gas has to be taken in consideration too, with its different characteristic and implications.

Then, also the exclusive attention to importing countries and their supplies on the one hand, and the limitation to effects of price trends on the other, could work when the central issue was the dependence of Western countries on OPEC producers that could control the global offer and prices on the market. Today such a scope is visibly too narrow-focused for an updated and comprehensive definition of the concept.

A new paradigm, must be able to overcome the strict identification of energy security and energy policy with economics, and expressly admit also the possibility that foreign policy is not only able to affect energy geopolitical equilibria indirectly, as in the 70s, that is with OPEC countries reacting to “punish the west”, but rather that foreign policy objectives are entirely interdependent with energy security and policy.

This is the reason why I really appreciate and I want to include in my paper Verrastro and Vladislaw’s approach to energy policy, which is necessary also to understand and integrate an updated and broadened conception of energy security.

They assert that “avoiding overreliance on any one fuel or provider of energy requires complex

trade-offs among economic, security, and environmental objectives”[[91]](#footnote-91), or in other words, that energy security, largely pursued through diversification, can be only shaped balancing economic, foreign policy and environmental objectives, as in the figure below.



This has the advantage of showing clearly how a good energy mix is obtained through a policy aiming at diversifying the offer or the demand to be able to attain to a satisfactory degree the three competing objectives contemporarily.

Reminding that this study deals almost totally with natural gas, the scheme above has anyway the advantage of giving a general idea of energy policy according to the latest standards and show the position of states according to this “triangular” configuration.

It should be then stressed that diversification is not only a matter of energy source selection but also a matter of choosing the right energy buyers (for producers) or providers (for importers).

I agree when it is said that diversification is the core of energy security[[92]](#footnote-92) and it should be regarded as such when any issue regarding energy policy is analyzed.

Also Daniel Yergin, when he called for an expansion of the energy security concept to include “the protection of the entire energy supply chain and infrastructure”, acknowledged that, among the other factors, diversification is for sure the fundamental factor and dimension of security.

Taking into consideration the entire energy supply chain and infrastructure represents a radical theoretical switch, more than it might appear. Reading this example by Yergin will give an idea of the importance of a change of perspective in this direction.

 In the United States alone, there are more than 150 refineries, 4,000 offshore platforms, 160,000 miles of oil pipelines, facilities to handle 15 million barrels of oil a day of imports and exports, 10,400 power plants, 160,000 miles of high-voltage electric power transmission lines and millions of miles of electric power distribution wires, 410 underground gas storage fields, and 1.4 million miles of natural gas pipelines. None of the world's complex, integrated supply chains were built with security, defined in this broad way, in mind. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita brought a new perspective to the security question by demonstrating how fundamental the electric grid is to everything else. After the storms, the Gulf Coast refineries and the big U.S. pipelines were unable to operate--not because they were damaged, but because they could not get power.[[93]](#footnote-93)

This paper does not consider, as said, LNG variables, however, just to mention it, for sea routes also chokepoints (together with physical security and piracy) are a major questions in contemporary energy security analysis, and respond to the same principle.

Obviously, since the totality of Russian natural gas in the triangle Central Asia-Russia-Europe is transported overland, resting upon the structural issue, collaboration among trading partners is vital to ensure and enhance security of the entire supply chain, in response to reinforcing energy interdependence and rapidly growing global energy trade.[[94]](#footnote-94)

The also increasingly widespread use of long-distance, cross-border pipelines must be considered in the light of these statements.[[95]](#footnote-95)

Moving the attention to diversification factor, it is easily justifiable that “multiplying one's supply sources” lowers “the impact of a disruption in supply from one source by providing alternatives, serving the interests of both consumers and producers, for whom stable markets are a prime concern”.[[96]](#footnote-96)

Being Russian national interest the center of the analysis, the latter affirmation has the merit of recognizing that not only importers are concerned about guaranteeing energy security to enterprises and residents but also producers have to cope with security concerns and are equally advantaged by an adequate differentiation.

Yergin, along with this, enumerates a set of other principles of energy security, noting that diversification is the most popular and the one which has always had the most significant impact in reality. Nevertheless, diversification needs to be considered together with other trends such as 1) resilience, 2) high-quality information, 3)collaboration among consumers, and between consumers and producers, 4) expansion of IEA system, 5) inclusion of infrastructure and supply chain, 6) robust markets and flexibility, 7) renewed efficiency for energy and climate reasons, 8) investment flows and research and development.[[97]](#footnote-97)

Not only to put the emphasis on strategic issues but also to make the research design simpler I will give the priority to diversification as the main drive for security, and, being their contribution minimal I will overlook many of the principles above apart from the collaboration of producers and consumers, which will be assessed further on.

In particular, I need to clarify that, also in relation to the preceding figure about objectives of energy policy, I am not going to examine the incidence of environmental concerns more than is needed to established the level of supply and make forecasts due to growing efficiency, above all because focusing on natural gas there will be no room for analyzing and drawing conclusions on the composition of countries’ energy mix (and consequent export output).

In the light of these considerations it is finally possible to get a typology able to define the concept of energy security that will serve as a basis for the whole paper.

I will use as a starting point the broad definition given by Barton et al. (2005) which Biresselioglu (2011) suggests for its coherence with Yergin conceptualization and for its multi-faceted character.

Barton et al. divides the concept into four main sub-categories that are:

1. Security of supply
2. Security of demand
3. Reliability of supply
4. Physical security of installation and personnel

Security of supply generally represents an issue for importing countries whose vital stable supply flux may be endangered by a decision by a major producer to cause a reduction or disruption of deliveries for financial reasons (in order to get market prices to raise) or geopolitical ones.[[98]](#footnote-98)

The dual nature of security of supply is also acknowledged by Aad Correljé and Coby van der Linde (2006) when they examine the possible future of international energy relations and oil and gas industry making use of two storylines. Those are “Markets and Institutions” which “exemplifies an economically and politically integrated, multilateral world with effective institutions and markets” and “Regions and Empires” which corresponds to a “world broken up in rival political and economic blocks, competing for resources and markets via political, economic and military power”.[[99]](#footnote-99) Allegedly, these storylines affect directly and with very different outcomes the development of the energy market, the way in which energy supply may be secured and the applicability of the several types of instruments available.[[100]](#footnote-100)

No need to say those are theoretical models whose aim is to indicate a trend, not to correspond to reality and being directly applicable. In nowadays international relations both tendencies are present and both have to be taken into consideration to draw conclusions about the case at issue.

The second point, the security of demand, has special relevance in my case study, since it is the main security aspect of producers. This category “includes the interdependence between energy consumer and producer countries, focusing on the fact that producer countries also need to secure their demand” and to establish long-term relationships based on a stable and predictable outflow at favorable prices.

Security of demand as asserted by Mohammed Barkindo is often overlooked by consumers, and I add, in general by scholars. However, “for producers, it is as important and as basic as security of supply.[[101]](#footnote-101) Security of demand goes hand-in-hand with security of supply”. OPEC's Second Solemn Declaration, emphasizes "the strong link between the security of supply and the security and transparency of world oil demand." The Long-Term Strategy adopted by OPEC in September 2006 refers to "the security of regular supplies to consumers, as well as the security of world oil demand."[[102]](#footnote-102)

Reliability of energy supply is somehow a synonym for well-functioning energy markets[[103]](#footnote-103)and, should be assessed considering two components, adequacy and security.[[104]](#footnote-104) According to McCarthy et al. (their focus in on electricity, but the definition is perfectly useable in our case) adequacy “refers to the ability of the system to supply customer requirements under normal operating conditions” while security “ includes the dynamic response of the system to unexpected interruptions and relates its ability to endure them”. In a nutshell a system can be considered reliable when it has the “ability to provide the quantity and quality of energy desired by the customer when it is needed”.[[105]](#footnote-105)

In practical terms, reliability is a concepts based on future expectations.[[106]](#footnote-106) Any threat to a stable energy relationship, should it be price volatility, political instability, the risk of terrorist activity or any factor perceived as the possible cause of supply disruptions[[107]](#footnote-107) is inversely proportional to the reliability of the supplier and its supplying system.

it must be then emphasized that energy security has also an important temporal dimension; It would be in fact questionable not to include in the approach also the objective of sustainability[[108]](#footnote-108), in other words the maintenance or the enhancement of present energy security standards in the foreseeable future.

In conclusion to this categorization by Barton et al., having moved the stress to a structural conception of energy security, reference to infrastructural failure can’t be either neglected.

“Physical security of installation and personnel” refers to preventing or taking measures against risks which can result in an interruption in the energy flow.

Examples can be technical breakdowns along pipelines, natural disasters, terrorist attack against the processing and transportation infrastructure or eventually piracy at the detriment of seaborne carriers.[[109]](#footnote-109)

In summary, energy security is a complex concept which, to be complete must include the interests of consumers and the supplier plus the stability of their market relationship and the reliability of the supplying network. It must be also a concept that stresses the situation of interdependence that energy relations create.

## 5.2 “Power and Interdependence” and international regimes

The problem formulation at the core of this study sets as the main focus Central Asian natural gas resources and the motivation for Russia to avoid the fulfilment of such a project.

However, I believe it would be a theoretical mistake to switch immediately the attention to Russia’s neighborhood without analyzing the nature of the natural gas trading relationship between Russia and Europe beforehand.

I have to account for a simple but central matter first, which will serve as a prerequisite for any further research, that is the reason why Europe needs to diversify its gas supply, provided that Russia is fully able in the foreseeable future to satisfy European demand alone, even in case of a boost in European consumption that exceeds agencies and companies’ estimations.

It is in fact hard to believe that all the matter is about achieving a higher diversification just for the sake of the principle. Given that building international pipelines, as we have seen above, commits to huge investments and brings along huge geopolitical implications, energy projects are justified only by real necessities and national interests.

To put it in an even more straightforward form, the question here is about what makes the status quo of EU-Russia energy market sub-optimal and in need for a change.

On the other hand, an assessment of Russia’s position in the relationship is also necessary, in order to figure out what are the stakes that motivate Russia to maintain the status quo, beside that of maintaining the current share in European imports.

All of this will occupy the first part of my analysis, and what I want to include in this paragraph is a short introduction to the theories I will then need to use for understanding this important issue.

The two theories I need in this part of my case study, that are also strongly interconnected with each other, are interdependence theory and international regime theory, both of them primarily extrapolated from Nye and Keohane’s masterpiece “Power and Interdependence”.

It is in this book that the two authors propose a definition of interdependence as a situation “characterized by reciprocal effects among countries or among actors in different countries”, and these effects are usually originated by international transactions, that is flows of money, goods, people, and messages across national borders[[110]](#footnote-110).

Alexander Medvedev, deputy chief of Gazprom, affirmed that “the interdependence is a guarantee of a strong commercial partnership and stable supply over the long term”.[[111]](#footnote-111)

I see this as a confirmation of what I sustained in the previous part about energy security; producers and consumers’ security are the two sides of the same coin and in a simple system any change on one side acts necessarily in the framework of a zero-sum game.

This is basically due to the inflexibility of natural gas pipelines (that carry the totality of Russo-European flows) which creates a strong “closed” bilateral system between producer and consumer, and that hardly influence third parties, like in the oil market, where the latters are exposed to virtually any change in the market[[112]](#footnote-112). Anyway I agree with Esakova, upon the fact that “energy security is all about interdependence, as interdependence lies in the basis of every transaction involving supply of energy resources, either oil or gas”[[113]](#footnote-113).

Cooperation and interdependence have to be seen as intimately related, notably in the energy field, as “interdependence is the cornerstone and precondition for cooperation and regime building in this area”[[114]](#footnote-114).

The clue of the analysis connected to this theoretical part, is to point out what kind of interdependence exists in this particular relation, and, stressing that interdependence is often asymmetrical (therefore with one part more dependent on the partner than vice versa) I will need to assess it precisely and find out whether the character of this interdependence relationship reflects the capability of the two actors to use their advantage as a tool of power[[115]](#footnote-115).

The assessment should not predictably be carried out only looking at the trading volume, but by using two key concept also introduced in “Power and Interdependence”, 1) sensitivity and 2) vulnerability, that is, respectively, “the costs suffered by the actors from effects imposed from outside before policies are altered to change the situation” and “the actor’s liability to suffer costs imposed by external events even after policies have been altered”[[116]](#footnote-116).

Nye and Keohane introduce also the concept of “complex interdependence” bringing to the extreme consequences the effects of an interdependence and to create an ideal type diametrically opposed to the pure realism[[117]](#footnote-117). Interstate relationship, including the use of military force and coercion, in presence of complex interdependence, are overtaken by multiple channels of contact among societies and intergovernmental issue do not respect a fixed hierarchy unlike in the realist perspective[[118]](#footnote-118).

The next step of this analysis is going to deal with international regime, that is also a major theme introduced by Keohane and Nye.

They are defined as "governing arrangements that affect relationships of interdependence", definition that was admittedly deduced from John Ruggie, who described regimes in 1975 as "sets of mutual expectations, generally agreed-to rules, regulations and plans, in accordance with which organizational energies and financial commitments are allocated."[[119]](#footnote-119).

The general meaning of this, is that relationships based on interdependence are almost always deeply influenced by networks, rules and procedures that “regularize behavior and control its effect”[[120]](#footnote-120)

Following Esakova’s inspiring study, but keeping the attention on the present rather than on the evolution of regimes and the conditions that cause their evolution, it is going to be very useful to interpret where the current Euro-Russian energy relationship is located in the continuum between the two ideal types, since, I restate it for the sake of precision, this relationship and its assumed long-term uncertainty are the driving force of the whole system on which the study is rooted.

## 5.3 Geopolitics and Spheres of influence, Mearsheimer’s Offensive Realism

Geopolitics in extreme synthesis can be defined with the words of Encyclopedia Britannica as the “analysis of the geographic influences on power relationships in international relations”[[121]](#footnote-121).

Another definition, broader in terms and very useful for this paper, is the one proposed by Grygiel. He suggests that Geopolitics can be seen as the “human factor within geography”[[122]](#footnote-122). “It is the geographic distribution of centers of resources and lines of communication, assigning value to locations according to their strategic importance. The geopolitical situation is the result of the interaction of technology broadly defined and geography, which alters the economic, political, and strategic importance of locations”[[123]](#footnote-123).

Eventually, one last approach that is worth quoting, is deducible from Cohens’ definition which has the advantage of drawing attention on the multi-layered character of geopolitical relations and happenings correlations, together with the one of recognizing a direct link between politics and geography. Geopolitics is from this point of view definable as “the analysis of the interaction between, on the one hand, geographical settings and perspectives and, on the other, political processes. The settings are composed of geographical features and patterns and the multilayered regions that they form. The political processes include forces that operate at the international level and those on the domestic scene that influence international behavior. Both geographical settings and political processes are dynamic, each influences and is influenced by the other”[[124]](#footnote-124)

Provided that geography, considered as constant physical reality and setting, by itself cannot explain any variation in foreign policy[[125]](#footnote-125), the concept of geostrategy should be instead rapidly examined to avoid confusion.

Geostrategy is normally regarded as “the geographic direction of a state’s foreign policy”[[126]](#footnote-126).

In more detail, it deals with the geographical space where a state “concentrates its efforts by projecting military power and directing diplomatic activity”[[127]](#footnote-127).

However the basic rationale of Geostrategy is that, having to face scarcity of resources, states cannot avoid conducting a geographically selective political and military foreign policy[[128]](#footnote-128). Geostrategy ends up being therefore merely descriptive of a tendency and is not concerned with either underlying motivations and decision-making processes or geographic and geopolitical factors affecting the latters[[129]](#footnote-129). In fact, even if today such behaviors have become more rare, a state may hypothetically struggle to get control over a location just because of ideological reasons, pushed by interest groups, or simply to satisfy the caprice of an irrational leader[[130]](#footnote-130).

When I use the term “strategy” it will thus stand for Geopolitical strategy, that is a pondered medium or long-term behavior by actors who recognize and shape interests according to the geographical location and make efforts to make the most out of the latter in terms of an enhanced power or security vis-à-vis competing states in a determined area.

The father of geopolitics is almost unanimously considered to be the German physical geographer and zoologist Fredrich Ratzel who basing on Rudolf Kjellen input and on his background knowledge moved its attention and interest to explain how human society is shaped by the environment in which it leaves, assuming therefore in a sort of social Darwinism that human social evolution is a response to physical settings.[[131]](#footnote-131)

By the time two main currents grew out of such considerations, the so-called German and Anglo-Saxon schools. The first, through the work of scholars such as Ritter, the abovementioned Ratzel and then Haushofer, who, involuntarily contributed in building Nazi’s theoretical fundamentals, and therefore indirectly also in the decline of the discipline, consequent to the Nazi defeat[[132]](#footnote-132).

The conception of states for Germans geopolitics followers was the science that conceived and studied the state as a geographical organism or as a phenomenon of space which is kept in a perpetual struggle for existence and space[[133]](#footnote-133). The state is thus compared to an organism, which needs to secure a vital space, which grows together with its power and maturity and it’s itself a requirement for further growth; the expansion in new areas from this perspective are thence carried out through occupation and cultural, racial and ethnic dissemination[[134]](#footnote-134). Anglo-Saxon school, instead, whose most notable examples should be seen in Mackinder and Spykman, had a remarkable influence also during the cold war, affected today’s Russian Eurasianism and provided the basis for the theorization of the so-called “New Great Game”.[[135]](#footnote-135)

The basic rationale of Anglo-Saxon geopolitics tends to be much more structural than its counterpart and tries to explain how geographical conditions influence the strategy of states to enhance their power, provided that some particular territories give a significant overall advantage to whom who controls them.

Mackinder in particular individuated an area called the Pivot of history (later Heartland), which included the central part of Russia together with Central Asia, to be enlarged in a second moment to comprehend also Eastern Europe until Danish Straits and the Dardanelles[[136]](#footnote-136).

Allegedly, the control of this geographical territory by a single power will make it the undisputed ruler over Eurasia and ultimately over the world, especially after the development of railways in the area that made it possible to physically unify this territory[[137]](#footnote-137). Spykman, adopting the same tripartite subdivision of the world as Mackinder, reversed the perspective and put the emphasis on the so-called Rimland which separated the Heartland from ports available all-year-long which could be used by an Eurasian empire to face peer-to-peer Sea powers[[138]](#footnote-138). This is often thought to be the essence of Truman’s containment policy vis-à-vis Russia.

I am obviously not going to apply this aged theories directly but it was very important to introduce the fundamentals of geopolitical thinking since, in spite of differences it is intimately connected to energy security.

Classical geopolitics is concerned with great powers’ confrontation to get key territories for further power rather than getting resources per se.[[139]](#footnote-139)

Actually, with the present world order, funded on the UN Charter and Collective security it is evidently inconceivable to provoke a major conflict to subvert the status quo and dominate the word including great areas in a multinational empire.

That is probably the main reason why contemporary geopolitics focuses more on resources, and first of all, control over energy resources to enhance one’s power in comparison to rivals.

We can say that geopolitics of energy and energy security are two interconnected and entangled concepts, and both are linked to the static and dynamic aspects of location. as far as the first is concerned, “the geographic location of reserves and production and the location of consumption have profound implication for energy security, particularly when they do not coincide”. As for the dynamic aspect “there is a security concern related to the transport of oil and gas from its site of extraction to the consumer”.[[140]](#footnote-140)

Political and economic event, wherever they occur, in producing, transit, or consuming state nearly in all cases have direct impact on availability of gas flows[[141]](#footnote-141) and, therefore, on prices, which then alters the overall conditions of the market, also for actors non directly involved in the relationship that for some reasons undergo a change.

Since this paper focuses on Russia, a brief overview of Russian current geopolitical orientations is also needed, notably if deemed the foundation of its foreign policy.

The Soviet break-up represents an epochal trauma in Russian history and its consequences on cultural, economic and political identity will presumably last for a long time.[[142]](#footnote-142) Apart from this, the end of USSR indirectly triggered a number of conflicts of different nature, particularly in Central Asia, like narcotics’ trafficking, illegal immigration, terrorism, ethnical uprisings, but above all “the economic conflict over the Caspian Sea and issues of competition for energy resources with former Soviet haves-not”.[[143]](#footnote-143)

Contemporary Russian geopolitics has grown out of the necessity of responding to the challenge related to this combination of conflicts in the Eurasian area, which was formerly held together by a common Eurasian identity and by the stabilizing role of Russia.[[144]](#footnote-144)

During 90s and the beginning of the 2000s, Russian geopolitical thinkers aimed to answer questions such as “If Russia is currently unable to stabilize the area as before, who is going to take over this role?” or “what has Russia become within its new geopolitical boundaries and how should it reconstruct its traditional geopolitical identity”?[[145]](#footnote-145)

Russian geopolitical thinking has always been from its inception in 30s drenched with Eurasianism, that is the emphasis on Russian “geopolitical and cultural uniqueness and distinctiveness from both Western and Asian worlds” and on the need to capitalize on its cultural and geopolitical independence.[[146]](#footnote-146)

Basing on this strong stress on regional autonomy and uniqueness many external commentators used to look at Eurasianism as a tendency “reﬂecting uniform and essentially anti-Western thinking and of cloaking a Russian drive for imperial restoration”[[147]](#footnote-147) but instead the Eurasian geopolitical school is composite (at least 4 different currents) and the fact there is a common view about Russia as Heartland, or the state responsible for organizing the post-Soviet disorder, this does not anyway mean that all of these contemporary scholars are “supporters of a Mackinder-like drive for world domination”[[148]](#footnote-148).

It stands clear that Russian geopolitical thinking has been perceiving its Central Asian and Caucasian “backyard” as belonging to its sphere of influence, and as a result of the Eurasianist assumptions expounded above, I wish to introduce one last theoretical tool that is going to be employed in the analysis that follows to understand the importance of Central Asian resources for Russia, that is Mearsheimer’s offensive realism, around its particular aspects dealing with spheres of influence.

In a clinical case study, being the central purpose, as I said in the methodology, the explanation of certain complex dynamics and their re-composition in a single unique framework, I need to resort to well developed and structured theory which is anyway very close to the conceptual ground so far examined.

Geopolitics, that has an important role in Mearsheimer’s offensive realism theory, is not alien to the broader realist tradition, in spite of the attempt by Waltz to reduce the analysis to a sole structural system “where the international distribution of power capabilities is the only variable of consequence[[149]](#footnote-149)”. Geopolitics, that in this case means adding an intermediate variable at the unit-level, the state location, has been present in realist thought for the very inception of realism itself and geography has also being often considered in recent post-classical realist contributions that beside international power structure take into account the effects of non-structural systemic variable.[[150]](#footnote-150)

Mearsheimer believes that the essential purpose of every states is maximizing its relative power to reach the ideal aim of global hegemony.[[151]](#footnote-151) Since attaining global hegemony, is impossible in practice, due to the fact it would be allegedly too hard to project and maintain forces across the world’s oceans, then regional hegemony takes the priority as the key strategic aim for any state and as Mearsheimer’s analytical focus. [[152]](#footnote-152)

Hegemony is achievable through two main strategies 1) getting power directly, by war, blackmail or bait-and-bleed/bloodletting risky techniques, or 2) indirectly by hampering and preventing opponents from making gains; the best option to undertake depends on the “regional distribution of military power” in first place and on geographical location.[[153]](#footnote-153)

The purpose of using this theory is attempting to identify whether a condition of balanced multipolarity, also frequently called “New Great Game” is taking place in Central Asia and what its connection is with the abundant natural gas resources in the area, ultimately, in order to answer the problem formulation with an international, strategic and structural perspective.

# 6.Analysis

## 6.1 Russo-European interdependence and the potential Impact of Turkmen Gas.

Since the priority of this paper, I remind, is to identify the reasons for Russia to forestall EU’s access to Turkmen gas, it is necessary, first of all, to analyze what kind of relationship there is between the two partners, assess whether there are asymmetries in their undeniable interdependence link and what kind of regime has been set in the last decades, from the inception of Russian exports in the 70s, and in case what are the issues these asymmetries bring about.

Starting with the opposite side, EU has apparently a weak position with its 61% gas gross inland consumption, 42% of which comes from Russia and the rest from Norway (24%), from Algeria (18%) and the remaining 16 % mainly from LNG exporters[[154]](#footnote-154).

I have already pointed out in the background section that the growing discrepancy between demand and domestic production will require increased gas imports to the foreseen percentage of 73% in 2020 according to the European Commission and to 86% by 2030 according to EIA estimations.[[155]](#footnote-155)

In general terms, while the EU is the most important trading partner for Russia (52.3% in 2008) and first foreigner investor, accounting for 75% of direct foreign investments in the country, Russia responds exporting as an overwhelming majority energy and mineral fuel products (68,2%).[[156]](#footnote-156)

An even more relevant datum is about Russian state revenues; 45% of all incomes of the state budget come from oil and gas, with the bulk of these coming from oil, and only 8-10% coming from gas. But it has not always been this way. If you look back at the early 2000s, oil and

gas provided less than 10% of budget incomes. It is only recently, as oil prices started to rise and gas prices were obviously following this trajectory, that the Russian government began to rely so heavily on these”.[[157]](#footnote-157)This decision by the Russian government seems to find a fundament in EU Commissioner Prodi in 2000 that declared the goal of doubling gas imports from Russia and remarkably ramping prices during the 2000s until the 2008 crisis[[158]](#footnote-158).

Growing trading and growing prices have been an explosive mix for rapidly rising tensions.

As I have hinted previously, the gas issue came back with force on the political scene as a security issue, both for Russia and EU between 2006 and 2009, when Russia cut off the agreed supplies to Ukraine in connection to pricing disputes with this eastern European minor customer and major transit state to Europe (80% of Russian export flows to Europe at the time).[[159]](#footnote-159)

Moreover another incentive to growing tension and debate was the decision by Russian government not to bring to an end through ratification the only real attempt of creating a unique legal framework to regulate this relationship represented by the Energy Charter Treaty—a document created following the Cold War to support European energy security and one that Russia had supported and signed in 1994[[160]](#footnote-160). This has to be read as a strong political message rather than a strategic choice with real consequences[[161]](#footnote-161). Thus, the past decade has to be seen as an ascending parabola of calls and complains for security of supply on one side and security of demand on the other; actually for a number of factors both Europe and Russia have implemented limited measures to diversify supply and markets respectively, limiting arguments to a great extent only to political rhetoric.[[162]](#footnote-162)

As I anticipated in the theoretical chapter, to evaluate the energy interdependence relationship between EU and our focus, Russia, I am going to use Esakova’s approach, based on the concepts of sensitivity and vulnerability originally introduced by Nye and Keohane.

The latter authors define sensitivity as the “degree of responsiveness within a policy framework, which focuses on how quickly the changes in one country bring costly changes in another and how great these costly effects are”[[163]](#footnote-163), underlining that sensitivity does not only take account of the volume of transaction flows across borders “but also by the cost effects that changes in transactions cause for societies and governments”.[[164]](#footnote-164) To put it in a more practical form, in an energy context, it is obtained from “the relative volume of imported energy in the overall energy demand of an energy importing country”.[[165]](#footnote-165)

Vulnerability, that is instead a more important parameter in evaluating interdependencies, is the cost of switching to alternative supply sources/outputs and policies or, to put it better, the concept “rests on the relative availability and costliness of the alternatives that various actors face.”[[166]](#footnote-166)

Predictably, in the reality, and taking a close bilateral system, one of the two parts is always more sensitive and vulnerable compared to its counterpart than vice-versa, this is what Nye and Keohane called asymmetries and which in energy relationships are likely to incentivize the advantaged party to exert some kind of political influence on the other[[167]](#footnote-167).

Now, to put in evidence, at least from the theoretical point of view, which of the two parts enjoys a compared strategic advantage in the interdependence relationship, I will briefly list the significant parameters to evaluate it on the two sides.

Esakova, here refers to hydrocarbons in general, while, still basing my analysis on her schematization, I will make an endeavor to limit it to natural gas issues in accordance to my initial scope limitation. However, the reader should be aware that if this theoretical choice is going to be beneficial for clarity in analysis’ results, in any case oil and gas dynamics when considering energy interdependence are intimately related, therefore if energy interdependence was itself the focus of the paper, then they should not be separated.

As far as the EU is concerned, I have already shown how the EU energy mix, notwithstanding the effort to boost the production through renewables, is still heavily reliant on natural gas, reliance which is incidentally expected to grow during next years.[[168]](#footnote-168)

Among the suppliers, Russia is the leading exporter to the EU considering that last year’s Norway’s primacy should be seen just as a momentary overproduction[[169]](#footnote-169).

LNG is not a viable alternative to the Russian- owned pipeline system and storage facilities are not enough developed to face possible disruptions of Russian gas[[170]](#footnote-170).

Ultimately, Esakova includes the political instability of major transit states, in primis Ukraine, as a risk posed to sustainability of energy supplies to European consumers[[171]](#footnote-171).

I actually have to express my dissent about this point, or at least diminish its incidence, since new Nord and South stream pipelines with a designed capacity of 55 bcm/year[[172]](#footnote-172) and 63 bcm/year[[173]](#footnote-173), together with Europe’s increased “reverse flow” transit possibilities[[174]](#footnote-174), will soon be practically immune to new gas disputes between Russia and Ukraine or Russia and Belarus.

As far as vulnerability is then concerned, on the supply side, this can be “measured by looking not only on the proportion of the EU’s needs and costs in case of a cut off of energy supplies, but also at the alternatives to imported energy and the costs of switching to possible alternatives.[[175]](#footnote-175)”

The EU’s energy mix will be covered to a great extent by natural gas and Russia will continue in the long term to be a leading supplier. At current condition than, presumably, Russia will have growing exporting potential and increase the margin on its leading position, since instability in other producing regions, northern Africa and the Middle-East in first place (notwithstanding higher producing prices[[176]](#footnote-176)) tends to make it the most reliable partner, once solved the matter of transit states[[177]](#footnote-177).

Not only gas diversification options in the natural gas market are geographically (dependence on pipelines’ routes) and politically sensitive, as just noted, but the most of European states have long term contract with Gazprom with deadlines until 2030.

Russia, apart from being tremendously dependent on energy trading both as state revenues and in terms of GDP share, has little options to diversify its output at the moment (both through LNG or pipeline), while still relying on Central Asian gas for domestic use and re-export.

Esakova already in 2012 underlined the important impact on Russian sensitivity of governmental stabilization fund (roughly 59 billion dollar in 2010) aimed at reducing the potential effect of short term arbitrary interruption (sanctions for example) plus the deterrence exerted in the latter case by the abovementioned long-term contracts[[178]](#footnote-178).

Moreover, beside the imposition of possible, as much as unlikely, European sanctions, vulnerability of Russia can be also deduced from the long-term threats, notably the “inability of Russian to provide for a long-term diversification of energy routes to alternative customers”[[179]](#footnote-179).

The key strategic points to decrease Russian interdependence vulnerability are therefore essentially 1) diversifying export routes (to Asian customers) 2) limiting diversification for Europe and on the domestic level 3) theoretically increase domestic prices,[[180]](#footnote-180)that would be anyway bad for domestic economy considering the widespread use for household and in the industrial sector.

I have the impression that the “Asian factor”, maybe also because of changing market conditions in the last years, is overestimated by Esakova. Here the critic is not moved to the principle, which is absolutely valid also from my point of view, but rather on the real possibility by Russia to look at Asia (especially China and the post-nuclear Japan) as a potential substitute of European customers.

It is a fact that Chinese demand is growing and it is expected to continue rising with a stable trend.[[181]](#footnote-181)Of course, as shown above Russia (and the state-owned Gazprom) would like to enhance their security of demand by lowering their vulnerability due to dependence on Europeans importers, but what might not have been clear in 2012, is that, by now Chinese market is already over contracted[[182]](#footnote-182).

It is not really a matter of choosing how to export Russian gas, either by pipeline or on LNG vessels, the fundamental problem is that China might not need any additional export in the medium-term and would probably accept only very advantageous offers in terms of price.[[183]](#footnote-183)

Actually, even though Russia is often considered the Saudi Arabia of natural gas, there is a major difference with the latter, that is extraction prices; Eastern Siberian field require more capital for drilling and processing that is reflected in a higher exporting cost[[184]](#footnote-184), therefore although the proposed Altai project[[185]](#footnote-185)would represent a very good opportunity for Russia to diversify and a very valuable route in terms of energy security, it is hindered much more by economic reasons than environmental concerns, per se already significant in the feasibility study.

Generally scholars agree upon the fact that, focusing on general trade movements, Russia is overly dependent on the EU than the other way round, and radically change its overall commercial strategy is at the present conditions practically impossible[[186]](#footnote-186).

It is anyway also true that energy policy, notwithstanding significant steps towards cooperation and coordination of supply infrastructure and policies, is still perceived as a sovereign policy area by EU members[[187]](#footnote-187) that continue to sign bilateral long-term gas supply contracts with Gazprom, losing de facto much of their bargaining power.[[188]](#footnote-188) .

I agree with Leonard and Popescu when they summarize the energy interdependence link by saying that “while the EU holds the stronger hand, its game of late has been consistently

weaker than Russia’s”[[189]](#footnote-189). Power, according to these authors should be in fact seen as the ability to achieve objectives rather than the share or the quantity of resources a particular country controls or trade vis-à-vis the other. Russia allegedly scored much better thanks to the way the EU allowed this relationship to be organized, with the result of weakening its own potential power and enhancing Russia’s.[[190]](#footnote-190)

In synthesis, EU’s “incoherent external policy”, notably in the energy sector, heavily damages its bargaining position in bilateral talks.[[191]](#footnote-191) [[192]](#footnote-192).

I believe that after a careful analysis it is possible to note that Russia has been able to achieve the objective of favorably rebalancing the interdependence factors, lowering the dependence on the West, as compared to the 90s, making smart use of commodities high prices and of long-term contracts[[193]](#footnote-193). The current interdependence, measured on reciprocal sensitivity and vulnerability, does not show, in any way, significant asymmetric interdependencies which might be used as a tool of foreign policy by one of the two parts. Nowadays conditions moreover, does not let any space to Russia to take the role of dominating actor in the system (I add, provided that this is Russia’s will, and clearly it is not) or that it will be able to get it at any time in the future[[194]](#footnote-194).

I want to remark then, that Russian state substantial revenues come at present basically only from natural gas, notwithstanding the lesser impact on the overall exports, because taxes have to be kept rather low to maintain the level of production of 10 million barrel per day without boosting prices due to high cost of extraction especially in Eastern Siberia or in the Arctic[[195]](#footnote-195).

The fact the Russian state is very interested in keeping revenues high to benefit its budget, justifies to a great extent also the choice by Gazprom, and of Russian State (that still holds the majority stake in the company) to pursue revenue maximization through favorable oil indexation, that after the crisis will continue to be advantageous, if maintained [[196]](#footnote-196).

This strategy has been made possible by the lack of competition to supply Europe, since partners cannot increase their production anymore (Algeria, Norway) or are affected by political issues (Egypt, but I want to mention also here Iraq and Iran)[[197]](#footnote-197).

In brief, I endorse the opinion of Alexander Medvedev, Deputy Chairman of the Gazprom Management Committee and General Director of “Gazprom Export”, when he stresses the fact that Gazprom has been a fully reliable partner for over 40 years, throughout Cold War and post-Soviet economic transition. The only exception of 2006/2009, moreover provoked by a third party, according to Medvedev does not substantiate the perception by some European governments that Gazprom is a “political weapon of the Kremlin” or, in other words, an instrument of Russian foreign policy : “The suggestion that Gazprom would invest billions of dollars in expensive gas export pipelines so that we could then disrupt them for political reasons looks absurd”[[198]](#footnote-198).

Provoking arbitrary disruptions in a situation of balanced interdependence, as the one that nowadays exists between Russia and the EU, would procure enormous losses and inconveniences on both sides, plus the reputation of a good supplier, that is at the base of security of demand.

I will therefore name the energy relationship at hand with the words of Chow and Hudson a “partnership of necessities”[[199]](#footnote-199) where the two parts are highly interdependent because technical, geographical and political factors do not allow for viable alternatives that would in turn permit a consistent diversification[[200]](#footnote-200) both of the supply or the demand. The sizeable raise of hydrocarbons’ price of the first 2000s has favored Russia that has legitimately capitalized on the situation of reduced concurrence, but now that the pipeline system has been updated and the Ukraine’s transit question has lost much importance, I do not see a real risk and need for heavily diversifying, if not for geopolitical reasons and preferences by single states and maybe the EU as a whole in the next future. To add a further point of reflection, I would like to stress the presence of higher risks on Russian side generated by the European lately stagnant demand which was foreseen to be much higher (220 bcma by 2020) when instead it has been keeping steady on the pre-crisis level (of roughly 140 bcma) with clear and direct consequences on the state budget[[201]](#footnote-201).

Now that the relationship of interdependence has been duly examined, it is possible to switch the attention to the main paper’s problem, and the contribution that this market and interdependence approach can give to solve the question about the reasons to hinder the construction of a Trans-Caspian Pipeline to Central Asia and Turkmenistan in primis.

What should be here examined is the difference a TCP can make, adding up Turkmenistan’s gas to the already advanced project of BTE-TANAP-TAP which is conceived to carry Azeri natural gas from the Shah Deniz field to Europe through Georgia and Turkey[[202]](#footnote-202).



Figure 3 Complete "EU Southern Corridor" TCP excluded

The easiest way to put in evidence the worth of Turkmenistan’s reserves and potential output is to illustrate what the impact is of an “inchoate” Southern Corridor, that is, a sole carrier of Azerbaijan’s production.

EU commissioner Oettinger in 2009 affirmed in regard to the decision of implementing a TAP pipeline “We have a definite commitment from Azerbaijan that gas will be directly delivered to Europe […] Whether the system consists of two gas pipelines – Tanap and TAP – or one single pipeline does not make any difference in terms of energy security. We now have a new partner for gas, and I am confident that we will receive more gas in the future.[[203]](#footnote-203)”

The EU commissioner seems to take for granted that the new pipeline from Azerbaijan will have positive effect on EU’s increased autonomy from Russia, but, keeping the focus on the EU-Russia energy interdependence, it does not seem to be the case.

While Nabucco was indeed a serious effort to upgrade the EU (I stress, perceived and theoretical) energy security, the TAP project is a privately funded endeavor planned with an investor’s pocketbook in mind”[[204]](#footnote-204).

Related trade agreements have been stipulated for an overall amount of 10 bcm per year to supply Italy and neighboring hubs with 8 bcma and Bulgarian plus Greek customers with the remaining 2 bcma (1 each)[[205]](#footnote-205).

All in all, looking at this data, it is plain that against a total current European import demand of 403 bcm in 2012 (considering both pipeline and LNG flows)[[206]](#footnote-206), 10 bcma is a minor progress to pan-European diversification, also considered that Italy and Greece already have very well-diversified energy mixes.[[207]](#footnote-207) It would be therefore difficult to rebut a Gazprom manager’s statement quoted by the Financial Times when he defined Azeri gas supply amount as “just about enough for a barbecue”.[[208]](#footnote-208)

The realization of Southern Corridor more than ensuring energy security to Europe will ensure Azerbaijan security of demand, and thus significant revenues for state finances and for the state Company SOCAR whose long-term survival is tightly bound with the continuation of Shah Deniz exploitation[[209]](#footnote-209).

In terms of security of supply, probably the only real winner from this project is Bulgaria, which currently satisfies its domestic demand entirely by Gazprom-exported gas, and that, pulling Azerbaijani gas alongside with the new Romanian interconnector will be able to come to a more than adequate diversification[[210]](#footnote-210).

When the original Nabucco project was under scrutiny, Bilgin pointed out that for its feasibility it required “additional suppliers because Azerbaijan can supply only half of the amount needed” and that “Turkmenistan offers numerous advantages in terms of reserves, transport security and net-back advantages for Europe”[[211]](#footnote-211).

Now, although on a different route, motivated by its significant lower implementation cost (4.4 billion instead of Nabucco’s 6.6 billion) discussion are being held about the possibility to expand in the future TANAP to the capacity of 60 bcma, to include Turkmen and Israeli gas plus Iran and Iraq[[212]](#footnote-212).

Only in this last case, with pipelines which equals the capacity of new Gazprom’s Nord and South Stream, the Southern Corridor could get close to be a threat for Russian share and primacy in certain European countries, enhancing thence the position of the EU globally considered and provided that it will go further in its effort for internal coherence. Actually it must be specified that data so far examined and the discussion above suggest that at present conditions, more than a strive for energy security per se, EU is trying to achieve a state of asymmetrical interdependence at its own favor (to be stronger in contract negotiations with Gazprom) and/or preventing that such a switch will occur at its detriment with progressive depletion of European fields.

Companies and policy makers both on the Russian and European side have by now understood that the only concretely viable option in the foreseeable future to supply an upgraded version of the Southern Corridor is Turkmenistan.

Iran in particular, notwithstanding its huge proved reserves, experience serious difficulties in balancing its domestic consumption with production and has aged and undeveloped infrastructure[[213]](#footnote-213) (which would be needed to transport the gas from the Persian gulf fields to Turkey). Other than that, and most important, currently suffers from the imposition of UN sanctions[[214]](#footnote-214).

Iraq, whose reserves are anyway controversial, would anyway likely suffer from infrastructure sabotage linked to ethnic clashes[[215]](#footnote-215), notably of Kurdish matrix, problem, the latter, common also to routes from Iran[[216]](#footnote-216).

All things considered this chapter has in synthesis demonstrated that taking a “market and interdependence” perspective, Russia takes interest in blocking Trans-Caspian project because it is the only way that Europe has in the foreseeable future to diversify its supply to a considerable extent, also modifying the substantial balanced interdependence in place nowadays, urging in this way Gazprom to apply more favorable conditions and undermining one of the most important sources of hard currency the Russian state has.

## 6.2 Energy security regime in the Russian-EU relationship

In the theoretical chapter international regimes have been introduced together with interdependence because of their very strong connections. International regimes, described in “Power and Interdependence” by Keohane and Nye as “governing arrangements – such as procedures rules or institutions for certain kinds of activities, created by government – that affect relationships of interdependence”[[217]](#footnote-217)have direct applicability and consequences also in the field of energy security when two or more countries interact with one another in a condition of interdependence. Energy security regimes, drawing upon the given general definition of international regimes are according to Esakova, governing arrangements that affect relationships of interdependence in the field of energy security[[218]](#footnote-218). The singularity of energy interdependence, is that, differently from general economic interdependence, and due to the inflexibility of pipelines, “gas based energy security regimes can be regarded as more susceptible to political influences”[[219]](#footnote-219). This also entails that controlling the transportation infrastructure means to a great extent being able to manipulate the overall interdependence balance[[220]](#footnote-220), as a producer, a transit state or even as a consumer.

This separate analysis is intended to give an answer to three main questions: 1) what kind of governing arrangements have been implemented (or attempted to implement) so far, 2) whether the international regime is closer to the realist model or to the one of complex interdependence, 3) why it has not been able to regulate the Russia-EU interdependence link.

This part of analysis has been included because, apart from contributing to the explanation of this troublesome trading relationship, it will put in evidence the general attitude of the two actors in energy policy that, when carefully employed, can be extended to their approach to GCS region too.

One important differentiation must be done between “pure” and “dialogue” security regimes[[221]](#footnote-221).

In the first model, actors usually share vital interests and can agree upon common decisions by consensus. That is why “pure” energy security regimes generally takes the form of institutionalized association of producers or consumers, for example OPEC or IEA[[222]](#footnote-222).

The opposite model, dialogue regimes, is connoted by the strong contraposition of parties’ interest, that are often producers and a consumers, and that collaborate only in order to come to a solution for a certain problem affecting their relationship, generally in absence of formal frameworks[[223]](#footnote-223).

Provided that in dialogue energy security regimes the distribution of power between the actors has a relevant role, they tend to meet the realist conditions of security regimes[[224]](#footnote-224). In particular, this configuration of the regime has a higher probability to be “highly dependent on the distribution of power at a particular moment of time and short term cost and benefit calculations”.[[225]](#footnote-225)In practical terms, any variation in the balance of power between the actors or a modification of their strategic interests are assumed to have a more or less immediate impact and “lead to a shift within the energy security regime or even a regime change”[[226]](#footnote-226).

Cooperation in the energy sector between the EU and Russia has been attempted basically on the ground of two very different mechanisms, the 1991 Energy Charter Treaty and the 2000 Energy Dialogue.

As far as the first is concerned, it is an initiative of the early 90s whose purpose was to establish a multilateral framework based on “commonly accepted foundation” for “mutually beneficial cooperation” in the energy sector[[227]](#footnote-227).

The Energy Charter Treaty thus allegedly “plays an important role as part of an international effort to build a legal foundation for energy security, based on the principles of open, competitive markets and sustainable development[[228]](#footnote-228)”.

Furthermore, the declared purpose of the Energy Charter Treaty is “to strengthen the rule of law on energy issues, by creating a level playing field of rules to be observed by all participating governments, thereby mitigating risks associated with energy-related investment and trade”[[229]](#footnote-229).

The ECT is a legally binding instrument signed by 53 states (all the EU states) plus the EC now EU as an independent signatory[[230]](#footnote-230) [[231]](#footnote-231).

The core of the ECT is covering key regional issues such as trade, investment, transit, dispute settlement and energy efficiency[[232]](#footnote-232).

In addition, its advantages are listed as providing “binding protection for foreign investors against key non-commercial risks, such as discriminatory treatment, direct or indirect expropriation, or breach of individual investment contracts through multilateral rules for international cooperation in energy matters”.[[233]](#footnote-233)

If the task of the ECT, under European pressure, was that of “enticing Russia into a common energy space based on market-based rules and clear governance structure” then it has failed, considering that Russia’s parliament rejected the ratification bill.[[234]](#footnote-234)

The reason behind this eminent defection was the Protocol on Transit and its effect of committing Russia to the freedom of transit “without distinction of the origin, destination or ownership of energy, and non-discriminatory pricing”[[235]](#footnote-235). Accepting this clause would equal giving away the exclusive right Russia jealously preserves to re-export Central Asian gas elsewhere at its own conditions[[236]](#footnote-236), with all the possible related financial and economic consequences.

From 2004 then, the ECT does not even appear anymore in Russia’s parliament agenda, since it has been fully removed due to its nature allegedly in flat contradiction with Russia’s national interest[[237]](#footnote-237).

I find this statement very important to acknowledge the rather unanimous inclination of Russian institutions toward a realist approach to the energy issue and consequently to energy security regimes management.

Notably, if during Yeltsin’s years Russia signing the energy treaty demonstrated a cautious opening towards multilateral binding regulations in the energy sphere, then, under Putin’s presidency there are clear signs of open hostility to any direct or indirect form of limitation of Russian sovereignty and decisional power.

The new European initiative for cooperation with Russia, the 2000 Energy Dialogue is a much weaker approach to the matter. It is a bilateral negotiation framework without any trace of automatic obligation for the parties or institutional character, but rather an informal basis expected to enhancing cooperation on issues of common interest like energy saving, rationalization of infrastructure, European investment possibilities and consumer-producers relations[[238]](#footnote-238).

Despite some results in minor practical issues and an actual advancement in Russia-EU discussions, the energy security regime continued and continues to be pivoted on clearly realist foundations. The bargaining about legal framework and investment climate is emblematic to demonstrate this tendency.

Both parties in principle favorably look at investment support initiatives, but when it comes to agreeing upon shared provisions then Russia and the Commission turn out to have very different priorities and arguments.[[239]](#footnote-239)

The fundamental task of the Commission is to give tangible assistance to EU-based companies that are interested in taking part in natural resources exploration in the Russian territory in order to ensure the level of supply agreed with their customers[[240]](#footnote-240). Moreover, the Commission, independently from its aid to private subjects wants to pursue its ultimate purpose of creating a pan-European energy market[[241]](#footnote-241) that is, basically, the same goal of the ECT, only conducted in a less pretentious fashion.

Russia, instead “strives to attract investments in specific areas”, in particular upgrading power plants and its aging energy infrastructure. All in all, its approach to negotiation is intent on including sites with very low rate of return and modernizing key assets, in order to ultimately “help Russia to transfer from mere raw material to exports to exporting processed energy goods”[[242]](#footnote-242).

This is just an example, however it has been chosen among others because it mirrors pretty well the attitude of the two parties in negotiations.

The EU, probably as a consequence of the weak position of Commission in negotiation, caused by the states’ often conflicting interests[[243]](#footnote-243), and even more, for its own history of compromises and gradual integration, seems to rely upon a sort of neo-functionalist strategy to build relations with partners.

The attitude towards cooperation of Russian government that emerge from analysis is practically opposite to the one of the Commission. The preference to an informal bilateral approach and the absolute priority given to national interest to the detriment of a framework for potentially fruitful more extensive collaboration denotes a plain realist tendency.

When, like in this case, one of the two partners refuse to pursue any form of integration or of supranational legal framework, then the cooperation cannot obviously move out of realist patterns.

My observation about a manifest strategy by the EU directed to its neighborhood to spread out its liberal values is confirmed also by Michael Smith when he asserts that “EU is pursuing a more liberal approach to global strategic action rather than a more military-centered strategy favored by realists”[[244]](#footnote-244). In further detail, an EU “grand strategy” seems to exist, and concentrate on soft power and on instrument like “1) Economic power (market access and ﬁnancial aid, as well as sanctions 2) Civilian power (diplomacy, legal/judicial missions, and good ofﬁces) 3) Ethical power (the promotion of human rights, the rule of law, and democracy) 4) Power of attraction (inspiring prospective member states or serving as an example to others”.[[245]](#footnote-245)

I wish to report then two recent episodes that I consider good examples to show the actual use by the EU of the Economic Power to modify the interdependence relation and switch the energy security regime closer to its own model. The 2012 Commission’s formal investigation into Gazprom on abuse of dominant position in infringement of EU competition rules initiated by Lithuania[[246]](#footnote-246) and the Third Energy Package (TEP)[[247]](#footnote-247)which would punish Gazprom’s vertically integrated chain structure and risks to be a heavy blow for Gazprom’s revenues and profits on investments[[248]](#footnote-248).

If the previous analysis of interdependence is considered, it is very likely that Russia, in a system of bilateral relations has enough power to maintain the status quo, especially until it keeps strategic allied in regards to energy policy inside the EU. There are in fact states often ready to defend Russian interests in the EU and seldom veto EU common position in the council, like Cyprus or Greece, and significant strategic partners like Italy and Germany that are usually very comprehensive when dealing with energy policy vis-à-vis Russia[[249]](#footnote-249).

However, to focus on the central issue of this paper, it is to be expected that in case the EU gain direct access to Central Asian resources, it will also attempt to act according to its liberal “grand strategy” and to implement also here a neighborhood policy pivoted on the principles of “preferential regional trade liberalization based on fulﬁlment of political and economic conditions”[[250]](#footnote-250). In practice, according to this theoretical approach, the EU, by establishing strong commercial ties, will also strive to influence the partners and act to get them closer to the EU standards, also on the political level.

Given that Central Asian countries, first of all Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan heavily rely upon energy commodities export for their production and GDP growth[[251]](#footnote-251) [[252]](#footnote-252), energy should be seen as the key sector for the EU to target, to enter the market and carry out the strategy discussed above.

Moreover, both of them have ratified the ECT that would already bridle them with a set of commitments toward European customers and presumably, in the medium-term, force Turkmenistan to privatize to some extent its energy sector,[[253]](#footnote-253) getting the state to lose an important policy lever. In brief, it can be argued that the EU behavior vis-à-vis Russia is very likely to revamp in case of a direct trade link with Central Asia. From this analysis emerged that, not only the EU tends to include its partners in a liberal-oriented market network, but that it also tends to apply a liberal grand strategy over the neighborhood, in order to reportedly stabilize its surroundings according to European economic and political standards. The Geopolitical implications in terms of influence that this foreign policy attitude can have are going to be examined in the following section.

## 6.3 Natural gas and Russian establishment, justification for the offensive realist approach

Before starting exploring the case through the offensive realist approach, I deem necessary to resolve a question which could otherwise get the reader to call into question the validity of my theory application. In the previous paragraph the potential impact of direct supply of Central Asian natural gas resources on state revenues and on the balance of the interdependence relationship at hand has been ascertained. However, when the focus is moved to geopolitical and security issue, it might be argued that the control of these resources primarily concerns the survival of the Russian political establishment rather than the influence on the near abroad.

In particular, the fact Russia has refused to ratify the Energy Charter Treaty and fiercely defends export routes from Central Asia westward, might suggest that Turkmen gas is fundamental for Russian energy policy.

To justify my analytical path, hereafter I am going to briefly explain my view about the matter and the reasons why the Trans-Caspian pipeline should be politically regarded as a threat to Russia’s regional hegemony rather than an issue of domestic politics.

I have already stated in some occasions that energy commodities export is vital for Russia in financial terms, and on the other hand it is also easy to demonstrate that gas was, and is still nowadays, for Putin one of the main drivers in his political strategy.

In the Putin’s doctrine in fact “oil and gas were paramount politically as guarantors of the security and stability of the Russian state”, and to achieve these tasks he was convinced that “the country’s natural resource endowment is the most important economic and political factor in the development of social production”[[254]](#footnote-254). In addition to that, “the raw material complex was the basis for the country’s military might and an essential condition for modernization of the military-industrial complex” and, last but not least, Putin also conceived the extraction sector as a tool in order to drop social tension by raising the “level of well-being” of the Russian population.[[255]](#footnote-255)

Although I am not going to investigate it in depth, this aspect could be anyway regarded as a confirmation of the need to preserve the greatest possible share in the European market to get politically relevant revenues.

To sustain the relevance of Central Asian gas in the domestic policy, what would have to be demonstrated is its outright positive effect on the Putin’s internal political targets above listed.

Considering that Moscow inherited a privileged position over the Soviet pipeline network and export routes after the 1991 break-up[[256]](#footnote-256), and used the Central-Asian-Centre pipeline to re-export cheap Turkmen gas mainly to Eastern Europe where Gazprom used to agree upon subsidized prices[[257]](#footnote-257), it stands clear that monopoly over Turkmenistan’s export had a beneficial effect on Russian revenues.

In more detail, gas from Turkmenistan was largely ceded to Ukraine and Belarus to preserve political ties with Russia through economic dependence and at the same time to secure the transit of the gas flow destined to Europe, avoiding deliberate disruptions.

Political relevance of discounts on gas contracts becomes evident in 2014 political crisis[[258]](#footnote-258), even more than during 2006-2009 disputes when the boundary between political and business reasons were somehow blurred.

In practice, cheaper Turkmen gas was used to cover domestic demand and low-profit politically-urged export[[259]](#footnote-259), to capitalize at the same time on domestic production by diverting it to feed European networks at much higher netback prices, that have grown steadily during the 2000s until 2008 crisis[[260]](#footnote-260).

From this point of view Russia, functioning as a transit state to Easter Europe first, and later on, as a re-exporter of Turkmen gas, undoubtedly let Gazprom boost its profits, and as a consequence sensibly increased its tax return too, which has been ultimately employable in state-financed projects.

However, as I have already said in precedence, today the situation appears completely different from the one just depicted.

Turkmenistan has been able to effectively diversify its export and enhance its security of demand sending substantial amount of gas to Iran and China, simultaneously sensibly cutting supplies to Russia.[[261]](#footnote-261)

Currently, from the amount of 50 bcma before 2009, only 10 bcma are diverted to Russia, while roughly the same amount has been agreed with Iran (while an capacity expansion is ongoing) and 30 bcma are instead regularly sent to China[[262]](#footnote-262)[[263]](#footnote-263).

Over the same period then, not only the “speculation” on Turkmen export is no longer possible due to the end of Russian monopoly on Turkmen export routes and the consequent opportunity for Gazprom to pay very low prices for its gas[[264]](#footnote-264), but it has also become largely unnecessary.

From the period between 2006-2008 Gazprom pushed for a transition to European market prices of CSI discounted long-term contracts with the result now that sizeable revenues come also from the former Soviet space[[265]](#footnote-265).

In conclusion, differently from the earlier period, when Russia benefited from its monopoly on Soviet network, data concerning post-2009 export from Central Asia to Russia do not provide any evidence of a present direct relevance in Russia’s domestic policy and establishment maintenance. With this awareness I consider justified my choice to look at Turkmenistan mostly as a potential competitor for shares in the European Market and an economic and political threat, respectively like of disturber of the current interdependence balance and power equilibria.

## 6.4 Geopolitics and Offensive Realism

In the previous part of the analysis I focused on the energy interdependence link that binds together Russia and the EU as well as on the ways this relationship may change at the detriment of Russian strategy in the aftermath of the implementation of a Trans-Caspian Pipeline able to guarantee stable flows from Central Asian and Turkmenistan in particular. Also the international regime regulating this interdependence has been examined, together with the tendencies of the actors involved in foreign policy and the possible repercussions of an EU extension of a “liberal” energy security energy in Central Asia. All in all the analysis so far has pointed out the presence of a well-balanced interdependence and of a realist regime, which opens anyway to the possibility for the EU to exert some kind of political influence on the eastern shore of the Caspian.

An effort was made to deliberately set the focus only on economic drivers, to proceed then with political ones in this part. As it was hinted in the methodology, in fact, my research design rests on a multiple approach aimed at separately trying to explain Russian behavior from different angles by using different theories, in order to provide a comprehensive explanation for the case at hand.

This section should be able to answer the following questions 1) is there an actual strategic competition aimed to acquire influence and control of energy resources going on in Central Asian/Great Caspian Sea Region? 2) what is the territory Russia perceives as its own sphere of influence and what are the related interests? 3) is the construction of the Trans-Caspian pipeline between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan going to negatively alter the status quo and why?

The literature review on the topic suggests that, in order to understand the strategic competition in the area, the notion of New Great Game should be regarded as a possible explanatory framework for the present question. The “New Great Game” is a relatively new concept, and may be dated back to 1997 when the downfall of the “end of the history” illusion made way to a renewed pragmatic view of IR.

In this year, the US former presidential adviser Zbignew Brzezinski launched a “Geostrategy for Eurasia” emphasizing that “what happens with the distribution of power in the Eurasian landmass will be of decisive importance to America’s global primacy”[[266]](#footnote-266).

Scholars tend to use this notion to indicate the current “competition in influence, power, hegemony and profits, often referring to the oil and gas industries and reserves in Central Asia and the Caucasus”[[267]](#footnote-267), with reference to the “original” Great Game, that is, the “shadowy struggle for political ascendancy that took place for most of the 19th and early 20th centuries between the British and Russian empires over Central Asia”[[268]](#footnote-268).

While the New Great Game turns out to be weakly connected to its forerunner[[269]](#footnote-269), nevertheless the concept has the advantage of including a few very important implications. It reintroduces in fact the traditional and suggestive geopolitical idea of a Heartland - Rimland competition, and together with it, also some sort of Cold War upswing, of which the Great Game would be ideally the prologue[[270]](#footnote-270).

While speculating about the historical pertinence of the concept does not fall within the scope of this paper, I see the idea of a “New Great Game” as a very useful schematization to look at the contemporary interactions in the area, first because it entails a systemic approach to the issue and second because it deals with the extension of a state’s power beyond its borders in function of national interest, namely thus in accordance with the notion of sphere of influence.

Per Gahrton notes that after the implosion of Soviet Union, there were some attempts to put forth project of cooperation in the area. An excellent example is 1999 Former Minister of foreign affairs Edward Shevardnadze’s project to build a “new Silk Road” largely based on long-distance railway transport as a way to enhance East-West cooperation from Western Europe to China with no substantial geostrategic changes.[[271]](#footnote-271)

Predictably the U.S., European states did not want to miss the chance to gain some power from the USSR’s ashes. As the US Department of Energy reportedly stated, to “share in one of the planet’s greatest supplies of natural resources” once it became open to foreign penetration after the collapse of the Soviet Union, was a one-time opportunity[[272]](#footnote-272).

Basically, both the US and European states from the 90s, and notably from the late 90s, wanted to avoid the possibility that Russia could once again attain the hegemony over an area that had been formerly an undiscussed “Soviet prerogative”. This reportedly marked the “beginning of a fierce battle for influence”, the New Great Game[[273]](#footnote-273).

Post-Soviet Russia, but especially “Putin’s Russia”, never put too much effort in ceiling the existence of a geographic area perceived as particularly important for national interest and somehow naturally bound to the fate of the Russian Federation.

Actually it was only after the short conflict with Georgia in August 2008 that the then President Medvedev affirming that "Russia, like other countries in the world, has regions in which it has privileged interests” and that “Russia will work attentively in these regions" gave explicit notice of renewed “imperial ambitions in the former Soviet Union”[[274]](#footnote-274).

George Friedman commented with these words the aftermath of the Russian intervention in South Ossetia and Abkhazia; “The Russian invasion of Georgia has not changed the balance of power in Eurasia. It simply announced that the balance of power had already shifted”[[275]](#footnote-275). He asserted in fact that the inability of USA to intervene on the Russian periphery (because committed on several other fronts) and of the EU to respond concretely (I deduce, because of its incoherent foreign policy and its interdependence with Russia) had opened a “window of opportunity for the Russians to reassert their influence in the former Soviet sphere” and the intervention at hand was the demonstration that they became aware of this renewed role[[276]](#footnote-276).

This attitude in Russian foreign policy roughly coincides with the inception of the fourth phase of Russia’s approach towards Central Asia pursuant to Oliphant’s categorization.

Oliphant in fact individuates three main phases (plus a newly emerged trend) in the evolution of Russian state behavior towards Central Asia from the Soviet Union break-up until nowadays.

The first phase lasted until the mid-90s when Russia, evidently engaged with pressing internal issues, did not have a specific strategy or policy to apply to its southern backyard, insomuch as the predominant pattern in this period was a “lack of interest and focus in Central Asia, ideological, political, economic, and even cultural”[[277]](#footnote-277).

The second phase instead corresponds to the so-called “Primakov doctrine” whose main aim was, with alternated successes, to set Russia back as “a centre of influence in its own neighborhood”[[278]](#footnote-278).

Finally, the third phase’s milestone is thought to begin with the appointment of Putin as president of Russia in 2000 and to be characterized by the rise of security and economic interest in Central Asia as important issues, notably after 9/11 and US growing presence in the area[[279]](#footnote-279).

The fourth phase I conceived is based on the idea, introduced by Alexander Cooley and Marlene Laruelle, of a “more focused logic of hierarchy” that keeps as a target the enhancement of integration with a selected group of states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) mainly in the economic and security sectors by using also soft-power means, in primis cultural and linguistic common aspects.[[280]](#footnote-280)

I have already stated that the ideal theoretical tool to understand the foundation of Russian behavioral pattern and policy attitude towards Central Asian and Caucasus, that is the core of the “area of privileged interest” to say it à la Medvedev, is the Eurasianist geopolitical thinking that from the aftermath of the Soviet Union and on has been the mainstream approach to tackle the issue of reorganizing the post-Soviet space.

I can allow myself to call it mainstream approach because virtually all post-Soviet Russian scholars, and allegedly also the majority of Russians themselves, “share the premises that both Russia’s domestic problems and conflicts on the Country’s periphery are largely geopolitical in nature and would be best resolved on the base of an overarching geopolitical vision and strategy, rather than separately on or an ad hoc basis”[[281]](#footnote-281).

Tsygankov, who succeeded in carrying out a detailed review and categorization of diverse approaches to Eurasianism, remarked that they all had in common the goal of defining Eurasia and Russian State’s objectives in this area, together with a corresponding grand strategy to achieve them[[282]](#footnote-282).

These “different intellectual traditions and political orientation” are classified by the author above as Expansionists, Civilizationists, Stabilizers, and Geoeconomists; he also added the so-called Westernizers, but in the light of present renewed global geopolitical contraposition, they had clearly made their time and lost the challenge with proper Eurasianism[[283]](#footnote-283) that, I remind, claims for a Russian unique role of regional power between the West and the East and that of a necessary stabilizer in the Eurasian landmass[[284]](#footnote-284).

Tsygankov’s work is valuable and to some extent is still valid nowadays, since the mentioned tendencies endure in minority political factions and have influenced Russian state relationship with its neighborhood and its evolution by the time.

In any case, this categorization was drawn up in 2003 when Putin external policy was still partially unclear and the debate on Russian Eurasian strategy was still in its vivid phase.

A more recent paper, published by Natalia Morozova in 2009, which deals with the link between Eurasianism and Putin’s Russia’s policy in post-Soviet space, comes to the conclusion that the dominant geopolitical thinking among Russian governing elite is, in the present, a reduction of traditional civilizational Eurasianism to its mere geopolitical and pragmatic component,[[285]](#footnote-285)the politics of spheres of influence and hegemonic spatial control[[286]](#footnote-286).

In other words, a steady rise of “geopolitics” has taken place and “marked a transition from an ideology- to an interest-based foreign policy”. This switch also implies a dismissal of that “sense of mission” that formerly tended to lead Russian foreign policy in favor of the practice of setting viable objectives in relation to the country’s might and new international balances.[[287]](#footnote-287)

The inclination to couple Russia’s Eurasianness with the legitimacy of national interest is still observable, but only in sort of endeavor to preserve to some extent a moral dimension adding up to the mere Realpolitik[[288]](#footnote-288).

However, the fact that geopolitical pluralism is by now unavoidable and that Russia has renounced to pursue a Soviet-style control over the former Soviet space, contributes in advantaging the power politics approach rather than visions grounded on Eurasian ideology/identity construction (“ideocracy”) which is regarded as secondary as opposed to the ultimate (although by now only theoretical), aim of “developing spheres of influence and exercising exclusive territorial control”.[[289]](#footnote-289)

In brief, Russian geopolitical thinking has visibly developed in a parallel line when compared to the standard continental and Anglo-Saxon schools, and has done so emphasizing the focus on the need for regional primacy both in function of inter-power balance and of Russian domestic security. If on the one hand the Eurasianist tradition has left its heritage in goals and geographical scope of policy action, it is also important to understand that cultural and identity factors have increasingly become an instrument more than a foundation for building a sphere of interest in the post-soviet space.

This is basically the reason why I deemed Mearsheimer’s offensive realism, with its focus on spheres of influence building and geographical advantages as main driver of confrontation in the international arena, the most adequate “theoretical lens” to use to investigate the question of the TCP from the systemic geopolitical perspective.

The Offensive Realism model, which concentrates mainly on great powers action, regards as the main goal in international politics the maximization of relative power compared to other noteworthy actors in the system[[290]](#footnote-290).

For their nature states would tend in fact to acquire hegemonic power in the world, but this is evidently made impossible by limited that resources and by the difficulty the hegemon would experience to maintain its leading position[[291]](#footnote-291).

Considering that states to achieve power, according to the realist paradigm, have at their disposal three main foreign policy options, 1) military expenditure 2) alliances and 3) conflict, it is possible to depict the offensive realist model by the following equation, taken from Cobb and Douglas (1928)where P stands for relative power, and the three other parameters are indicated with a, b, c which in turn stand for the level of investment dedicated to the related policy[[292]](#footnote-292). To put it simple, the equation shows that investing in one of the evidenced policies is directly proportional to a growth in relative power.

Actually, knowing that the investment potential of each state is different and limited by a series of constraints, or, in other words “a state cannot invest more in foreign policy strategies than their capabilities allow” it is also useful to define states capabilities via another equation, that is . Here, the three additional variables, indicated by x, y and z are parameters “that translate investment in each of the strategies into capabilities”[[293]](#footnote-293).

Clearly, being the ultimate aim of states that of maximizing relative power, it is postulated that capabilities are always entirely exploited, otherwise the resulting relative power would be sub-optimal.

These two interrelated functions have the advantage of showing the essence of big powers’ decision making, and, second important point, they emphasize the role of economic factors in increasing one’s relative power. As Mearsheimer affirmed “states care about relative

wealth, because economic might is the foundation of military might”[[294]](#footnote-294)

To wrap up what has so far been said, and schematize offensive realism’s postulations taking into account both the military and economic aspects, I report the following short explanation that will turn out to be useful henceforth[[295]](#footnote-295).

1. Military Spending: As the economic capabilities of a major power state increase, the major power will subsequently increase its military spending.
2. Alliances: As the economic capabilities of a major power state increase, the major power will subsequently increase its membership in alliances with other states.
3. Conflict: As the economic capabilities of a major power state increase, the major power will subsequently increase its use of conflict against other states.

Before analyzing the relationship making use of the concepts and postulates I have listed and illustrated, I should briefly recall what the Russian interests in Central Asia are, who the other players are in the “New Great Game” and how they act in competition with Moscow.

Russia’s interests cannot in fact be reduced only to the energy sector and to vague socio-cultural calls, but should be instead extended also to economic aspects and above all, security ones.

It is undeniable anyway that energy covers a very significant part of the relationship, also because Russia does not only receive gas from Central Asia (via the Central Asia – Centre Pipeline) but, Gazprom and Lukoil also develop a remarkable share of their production directly on site[[296]](#footnote-296). To be more precise over 20% of the total of these companies gas production is obtained in Uzbekistan, while Turkmenistan tries to limit foreign direct access to fields, if not as extrema ratio when high-level technical know-how is required for developing particular sites[[297]](#footnote-297). Obviously, control over gas pipeline routes is also a key factor as the previous part of analysis has demonstrated.

Speaking about economics in more general terms, anyway, Russia has been the first commercial partner of Central Asian countries since the Soviet break-up (mainly exchanging processed and manufactured goods in exchange for agricultural products and raw materials), and only in recent years China became the leader in these markets[[298]](#footnote-298).

It should be noted that infrastructure is still very interconnected in the ex-soviet space[[299]](#footnote-299) and that Russia has been making great efforts in order to economically integrate the area. From 2000 this has been done in the framework of the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) which successfully approved and implemented a customs union and in 2011 also provided for the creation of a Single Economic Space which ultimately led to the recent creation of a Eurasian Economic Union[[300]](#footnote-300)[[301]](#footnote-301).

Russia is therefore aiming at expanding the already successful current customs union with Belarus and Kazakhstan and integrating in a growing measure under its lead other Central Asian states, particularly Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, other than Armenia in Southern Caucasus [[302]](#footnote-302), evidently to rescue it from the geopolitical and economic isolation imposed by Georgia Azebaijan and Turkey.[[303]](#footnote-303) Apart from Armenia, moreover, also moves toward Ukraine’s inclusion in the new economic system “has taken on a decidedly anti-European Union tone, as Russia seems to spare no effort to ensure that these countries will join its own economic orbit, rather than associating with the EU[[304]](#footnote-304). I should incidentally stress that Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan at the moment do not intend to join in (Uzbekistan membership in EurAsEC lasted until 2008 [[305]](#footnote-305)), and it is very important to attract them to achieve a real and successful regional integration.[[306]](#footnote-306)

As far as security interests are concerned, beyond any doubt Russia is the leading security actor in the area, even though “it has both the means to react to a crisis and an assumed responsibility to engage” it also has “a palpable reluctance to intervene and would only do so if Russian territory or key interests were at stake”; the indifference with which Russia treated the 2010 disorders in Kirghizstan is a good example of this tendency[[307]](#footnote-307).

Russia, in completion to economic integration, attempted to build, together with other Central Asian states also a multilateral framework for security cooperation, CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization) and SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization), this last one also includes China as a member. Growing reliance has been put anyway on bilateral ties by Russia, especially regarding Kyrghizstan and Tajikistan[[308]](#footnote-308). These states in fact having no borders in common with Russia, and undeveloped energy sector, were less dependent on Russia and needed for integration both in the military and economic spheres, differently from the already more reliable Kazakhstan.

Looking at the consistent debt cancellation and aids to those two countries, associated with substantial help from Moscow to enhance their military apparatus[[309]](#footnote-309) a few doubts might rise from reading the situation as a deliberate action by Moscow to ensure cooperation and its military presence in the countries’ bases, to stabilize and reinforce its sphere of influence.

Once again, problems arise from the status of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, that strive to pursue a strategy oriented towards lowering their dependence on Russia both from the economic and military point of view.

Uzbekistan, other than from EurAsEC, withdrew also from CSTO in 2012 and that represents an issue for Russia, both as a crank in its sphere of influence if that is regarded as the objective of CSTO and as a threat to “collective efforts to deal with an unstable Afghanistan after the US starts pulling out in 2014”[[310]](#footnote-310).

Turkmenistan’s question, more simply, is instead all about its constitutional status of permanent neutrality[[311]](#footnote-311) and therefore unable to take part in military alliances or to grant its territory for military settlements.

In regard of actors “playing” the great game, detractors of the use of this notion as an historical comparison to the “Old Great Game” have argued that in this geopolitical competitions many state and non-state actors are involved. As the first category is concerned they usually mention China, Pakistan, Israel, Iran, Turkey and the USA, plus all the affected post-soviet states themselves (which must not allegedly be treated “as they were pawns in a global balancing game”). As non-state actors instead, reference is made to NATO the EU and OSCE, and on the sub-state level, also all big companies doing business in the area[[312]](#footnote-312).

Predictably, I cannot, in any way, share this chaotic vision of the reality. I do not absolutely call into question the fact that all the above mentioned, so-called, actors, have some kind of stake in the area. However many of them turn out not to be actor, in the sense that do not carry out any concrete action to influence the system. This does not probably happen because they do not wish to take up a certain role, but rather because they cannot, or, according to the theory, they have not adequate capabilities to enter the game outside power-led major alliances and they are thus forced to “freeze” or divert elsewhere their attention.

The “New Great Game” can and must be therefore downsized if the objective of using this concept is analyzing the effects on specific issues of factual power competition and balancing and not, instead, just enumerating potential actors with some, even weak, historical, cultural or economic ties. The “Game”, as illustrated above, is mainly about a positive-feedback circle between military capabilities and economic conditions, where ethno-cultural and historical aspects might be just an efficient tool for cementing alliances and easing the maintenance of influence over a given area.

With this parameters in mind, it is therefore possible to affirm that significant actors in the game, the ones that have the faculty of taking relevant foreign policy decision, currently are 1) Russia as a full-fledged actor in the system, 2) NATO in the security field (therefore comprehending US and many EU states as one single actor), the EU as an economic player in tune with NATO action, and China, even with some reserves.

I can sum up the situation as a competition for influence, resources and therefore, broadly speaking, for security, which is pursued in the modalities presented by the offensive realist theory between the West (NATO in military, single “Western” states and EU separately in the economic field) and the Russian Federation. China is a very important variable in the system but not a full-fledged actor, give that it does not currently show a deliberate will to intrude the regional military stability, if not in the framework of SCO. Its expansion in the area seems to have almost exclusively economic characteristics[[313]](#footnote-313).

If on the one hand, the erosion of economic hegemonic power of Russia by China in Central Asia, going back to the offensive realism core model, entails the reduction of a power’s (absolute or relative) capabilities, and therefore in turn also its capacity for military spending and authoritative membership in alliances, it is also true that China has to be seen as the lesser evil.

China, in fact being a traditional opponent of US from many points of view in the international arena[[314]](#footnote-314) and a member of SCO, other than the closest permanent member to Russia in the UN security council[[315]](#footnote-315) will be presumably very cautious, at least in the short-medium term, in attempting to take over Russia’s recognized role as the most powerful security actor in the region[[316]](#footnote-316). Undermining Russia’s influence in the area, and its efforts in the CSTO would mean, especially after NATO withdraw from Afghanistan, also undermining the political stability in the area and in turn 1) risk of disruptions in Central Asian supplies and 2) opening the possibility that direct strategic competition with Russia could be used by the “West” as a “divide et impera” technique to take advantage and facilitate its own penetration.

Since Turkmenistan despite its relevant reserves will have to increase its production with a very fast pace[[317]](#footnote-317), and Uzbekistan is very unlikely to boost any further its already over-boosted one, China could be seen from my point of view as, once again, the lesser evil, to satisfy the will of these two producers to enhance their security of demand through differentiation without embarking in a threatening Trans-Caspian-Pipeline.

The interest for influence in the area by US, NATO and the EU has undoubtedly been fluctuating in character and intensity from the break-up of Soviet Union and on.

The behavior of the West towards Central Asia during the 1990s has been read with different outcomes.

While Rumer stresses the primacy in the agenda setting of an extension of the free market and liberal institution rather than geopolitical and balance of power approaches,[[318]](#footnote-318)another interpretation with which I find myself inevitably more in agreement is Gahrton’s view of an effective and farsighted policy of penetration in the former soviet space, that this commentator does not hesitate to call, as a whole, the “Western Offensive”[[319]](#footnote-319).

This foreign policy plan reportedly grounds on the extension of NATO’s “Partnership for Peace” and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership council to target the whole former Soviet Space, Russia included, and, in parallel when Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the EU and Southern Caucasus states came into force in 1999, that was seen from some scholars as an EU attempt for integrating the South Caucasus in its own sphere of influence[[320]](#footnote-320).

In the same year, the “Clinton doctrine”, during the unauthorized bombing of Serbia, was interpreted by some American commentators “as the starting point for a US effort to convert NATO from a defensive alliance in Western Europe into a regional police force governed by Washington” while from France came the accusation of American aspiration “to control post-Soviet states”[[321]](#footnote-321).

This US-NATO-EU combined strategy brought to a set of hardly deniable strategic advantages. Focusing on natural gas and leaving oil aside, it was in these years that the construction of the BTE pipeline was decided and that South Caucasian states (Azerbaijan and Georgia) switched decidedly to pro-Western and pro-NATO positions with the participation in the Iraq invasion and the membership in NATO’s Individual Partnership Plan, a further and more selective step towards integration that deliberately excludes Russia[[322]](#footnote-322).

In the end, the 2008 study titled “Towards a grand strategy for an uncertain world – renewing transatlantic partnership” written by former American military leaders, called for the “establishment of a directorate consisting of the U.S., the EU and NATO” ultimately in order to “coordinate all cooperation in the common transatlantic sphere of interest”[[323]](#footnote-323).

The engagement of NATO in Afghanistan and the presence of NATO troops in many Central Asian states, together with the temporary cooperation between Russia and the U.S to fight Islamic extremists’ threat also had significant consequences on geopolitical balances[[324]](#footnote-324). The fact that Uzbekistan, for the second time has suspended its CSTO membership and “courted more security cooperation with the United States”[[325]](#footnote-325)may be seen as the sign it managed to take advantage from the relaxed post-2001 climate to carefully approach the West, even though probably as a renewed stratagem to “play off Washington and Moscow against each other”[[326]](#footnote-326)

To conclude by trying to give an overall assessment of geopolitical threats potentially generated by the construction of a Trans-Caspian Pipeline, I wish to emphasize the implication of the proposed EU complete Southern Corridor.

Once completed the conjunction between the existing BTE with TANAP, TAP and possibly TCP, this long-range pipeline will connect all NATO and NATO-aligned country (Georgia, and Azerbaijan) with the neutral Turkmenistan and most probably with a more and more “autonomous” Uzbekistan. It is also important to remark that it is not evidently by chance that Armenia has been excluded from any pipeline project in the area, notwithstanding the longer distance and therefore higher costs required for such a choice, but because this country is a traditional filo-Russian one[[327]](#footnote-327).

Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are still very dependent for their revenues on natural gas[[328]](#footnote-328)[[329]](#footnote-329), therefore, if a power wants to have a chance to exert some influence or anyway, and prevent another actor from achieving regional hegemony has to include natural gas trading in the strategy, being the third part of offensive realism’s equation, open conflict, practically impossible to use in this context.

Russia seems to have understood this, regarding as a symptom the sudden rise of prices imported from Turkmenistan, once as a monopolist and now in competition with Iran and China[[330]](#footnote-330).

Seeing the combined strategy of the late 90s and beginning of 2000s of NATO and EU it would not be surprising if EU, acting also as a NATO tool, made use of the Trans-Caspian pipeline to promote a strategic partnership, probably in the framework of Neighborhood Policy, towards these “undecided” Central Asian states.

From this perspective, the extension of EU neighborhood policy, is a particular delicate matter for Russia because it might in the medium-long term facilitate “colored revolution” like in Georgia or Ukraine and undermine the leadership of Soviet-styled Centro-Asian leaders, thus contributing to regional instability. Instability, that may be further fostered by stable US-NATO military presence in the area giving Russia an even stronger perception of NATO encirclement.

To conclude it should be stressed that Uzbekistan, as a double-landlocked country can do little without its neighbors. Excluding an open Western-oriented switch of Kazakhstan which is well integrated with Russia and China, and “filter” the majority of Uzbek exports, the key for the balance is once again held by Turkmenistan and the possible implications of a Trans-Caspian pipeline.

**7. Conclusions**

In this final chapter a summary of major findings is going to be presented, as stated in the methodology part, in an endeavor to recompose the different approaches I used in a single comprehensive explanation for the case examined. Given that one of the goals of this paper is to be also a policy-oriented work, policy conclusions are going to be separated from academic ones in order to put special emphasis also on this aspect.

**7.1 Academic Conclusions**

In the methodology chapter the paper has been defined as a “clinical case study”. According to the definition given above, the “case” at hand has been chosen trying to delimit the historical episode in which was included in a way to obtain a simplified (but not oversimplified) system with clear variables to analyze.

The selected well-defined aspect is the hypothetical implementation of a Trans-Caspian pipeline, and the context in which it has been analyzed is the economic and geopolitical relationship between the EU and Russia, in connection with their competing interests in Central Asia. The ultimate goal of the analysis was to individuate a plausible answer to the core paper’s problem reported here: **“What are the underlying real reasons for Russia to try to prevent the EU from obtaining direct access to Central Asian natural gas resources?”**

These two foreign policy actors have been selected as the “thesis’ backbone” because of their role in relation to the TCP, respectively that of project proposer and that firm opponent. Moreover they acquire immediately direct relevance both when tackling the question from a market perspective and when concentrating on security and strategic implications of this relatively modest energy installation. However also third parts have been taken into account during the analysis, provided that they could carry out significant action to influence the system I was examining.

The main theories chosen to analyze the case were essentially three; 1) interdependence theory, 2) international regime theory and 3) Offensive realism.

Each of them has demonstrated to be useful in view of the overall result, and, while considering the issue from different perspectives, these theories turned out to be very well connected to one another, proving that both actors behave in the system with patterns of behavior that mirror a precise and coherent underlying strategy.

The use of interdependence theory has helped a lot in assessing the current market relationship between the considered subjects. After taking into account not only quantitative data, but also the qualitative dimension obtained through the application of the concepts of sensibility and vulnerability to gas trading, it turned out that at present Russia and the EU are bound by a sort of “partnership on necessity”. In other words, they act in a very balanced interdependence with each other, and notably neither of the actors can exert significant political pressure on the counterpart, in spite of their probable will to do so.

At the moment, reaching Turkmenistan by a TCP is the only possible way for the EU to achieve a remarkable supply diversification and significantly enhance members’ bargaining position vis-à-vis Russia, and possibly the Commission’s negotiating position. Ultimately, from the European point of view, being able to speak with a single voice would be a real opportunity to favorably use the asymmetry the EU would have and likely strike much better deals in terms of price.

The EU diversification factor *per se* with its effect on the interdependence balance is in fact more important to avoid for Russia then the supplies from Central Asia in absolute terms, that in the medium/long term would not instead seriously affect Gazprom’s share in the European market (in view of a progressive reduction of EU domestic production).

The international regime analysis worked as a sort of nexus between the economic and the geopolitical approaches. It showed clearly that, notwithstanding the strong energy interdependence between the two actors, a full-fledged energy security regime, which could be originated by the ratification of the Energy Charter Treaty, is currently impossible to pursue, due to diametrically opposed attitudes towards cooperation by Russia and the EU. At present, Russia, by opposing any attempt aimed to create multilateral frameworks regulating energy trade, has managed to maintain a “dialogue” regime shaped on realist bases, which strengthen its position versus Europe.

Once verified that Central Asian gas does not directly affect anymore Russian domestic policy, and that Russian interest in the area is rather motivated by a realist reasoning on “spheres of influence”, the eventuality that EU could be able to access directly Central Asia and integrate it in a set of multilateral framework is probably seen from Russia as a plan to interfere in its “backyard”. To this end an European “liberal grand strategy” for expansion has been pointed out and to a large extent confirmed by facts.

This last threat is particularly important when it is inserted in the context of the geopolitical analysis and of the “new great game” of powers competing for influence in Central Asia. A commonality of interests has been observed between EU and NATO, while historical examples, notably Georgia and Azerbaijan, show that there is a real risk that they could act as a single “Western” actor and use EU soft-power tools together with the attraction of NATO’s hard power protection to erode the area under traditional Russia’s control and preventing its regional hegemony which is instead perceived as a key item in the agenda of Russian government.

In synthesis Russia has two main interrelated reasons to oppose the construction of Trans-Caspian pipeline 1) it would affect the substantial energy interdependence symmetry that at present, is more beneficial for Russia than for Europe 2) it would facilitate an expansion of EU’s influence in Russia’s neighborhood. In particular as far as the second point is concerned, EU, capitalizing on new interdependence ties, could slowly succeed in exporting liberal values to Central Asian states and include them in multilateral frameworks, weakening their bounds with Russia, and even facilitating “colored revolutions”, undermining the area’s political stability, another priority for Russia. The EU, in the end, could function as a vehicle to push Central Asian countries to a closer partnership with NATO, therefore moving in favor of the latter the balance of the re-emerging East-West strategic confrontation.

**7.2 Policy Conclusions**

The paper has pointed out that the Trans-Caspian pipeline does not only represent a threat for Gazprom’s business and Russian tax revenues coming by export, but also largely a strategic matter both vis-à-vis the EU and from a global perspective.

Since the paper is conceived to look at Eurasian energy issues from the Russian point of view, hereafter I am concluding with my stance about how Russian foreign policy should be conducted in the next future, in order to preserve vital interest in Central Asia and eliminate or reduce the concerns regarding the TCP.

It is obvious that Russia should continue opposing the Trans-Caspian project with every possible means, also threatening Turkmenistan with hard power if international balance allows to do so without detrimental consequences.

This can be easily done by keeping the Western actors busy in other geographical locations or with other questions that they perceive as more important than the penetration in Central Asia.

On the other hand, however, Russia should pursue an enlargement of Russian-led economic and security multilateral frameworks in order to include the whole area, also, and above all “undecided” states. This strategy would increase internal interdependence and already strong cultural ties, thus making more costly a possible switch of front towards the EU and NATO, in financial and popularity terms.

China, especially for its relative carefulness in openly pursue political influence in the area has to be regarded as the main potential ally against the Western intrusion. Not only Russia should try to export its gas in a growing measure to China to increase interdependence with the latter and its security of demand, but it should also strive to reinforce mutual and multilateral ties in the security sector.

Apart from this, Central Asian major gas exporters should be let absolutely free to secure their demands by increasing trade with neighboring consumers, first of all China. This will prevent them to take the risk of looking westwards and will give a further incentive to Russia-China cooperation due to shared interest and common “enemies”.

In conclusion, I consider as the best policy option for Russia, the one of obstinately trying to maintain the status quo in its relationship with Europe, while it should enhance instead cooperation with China, possibly bartering some advantages for the latter in the economic and security sectors with the reassurance that China will not try to expand its political influence in Central Asia.

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