Energy Geopolitics: A Comparative Case Study on the EU-Russia competition in the Egyptian Energy Sector

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May, 2025

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Abstract

As global powers compete for influence in strategic regions, energy diplomacy has become an important tool of foreign policy. Egypt is a growing energy hub in the Eastern Mediterranean, with a strategic location connecting Europe, Africa and the Middle East. This has attracted foreign powers, such as the EU and Russia, as strategic investors and geopolitical contenders in the region. While much attention has been given to the rivalry between the EU and Russia, few studies have focused on their indirect geopolitical competition in third countries' energy sectors, such as Egypt. This thesis aims to uncover how are the EU's and Russia's geopolitical and strategic motivations reflected in their respective approaches to Egypt's energy sector. The following research combines Regional Security Complex Theory with Energy Transition Theory. This framework captures the global and regional levels of the competition, highlighting regional political implications and broader global energy transition elements reflected in the EU-Russia standoff in the Egyptian energy sector. By applying a qualitative, comparative case study approach, policy documents, official statements and news, as well as trustworthy academic sources are reivewed. The case of Egypt was chosen due to its relevance in EU's and Russia's foreign policy agendas, as well as its growing importance as an energy hub with new natural gas discoveries and green hydrogen potential acknowledgements. This theis finds that while both the EU and Russia have similar objectives, namely, to gain more influnece in the region through engagement in Egypt's energy market, their respective approaches suggest distinct goals. The EU emphasizes renewable energy transformation, as well as regulatory and normative harmonization, which suggests that its broader goal is to integrate Egypt into its energy market as a supplier of renewable energy. By investing early in the green energy transformation of the country, the EU aims to create an asymmetrical relationship with Cairo, leading to more favourable energy supply agreements in the future. The renewable energy engagement also supports Brussels's goal to eliminate Russian imports from its energy mix, achieving higher levels of energy security. On the other hand, Russia's focus is on large-scale infrastructure investments, with nuclear energy as a main path. Moscow aims to secure new, stable energy export markets in Egypt. By establishing a 60-year-long contract of providing nuclear fuel for the El Dabaa nuclear power plant, and exporting Russian technology through the state-owned ROSATOM energy company, Russia is securing long-lasting, reliable energy export regions. This also aligns with its broader goal to diversify energy markets after the EU's turn from them, as well as maintaining its position on the global energy markets, as a leader in nuclear energy and related

technologies. This research contributes to the understanding of how energy diplomacy shapes regional geopolitics, and offers insight into the nature of great-power competition in less researches contexts, such as Egypt.

Length: 133.952 keystrokes

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List of Abbreviations

AI – Artificial Intelligence

BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa

DOS – Department of State (USA)

EBRD – European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

EC – European Commission

EEAS – European External Action Service

EEC – European Economic Community

EEZ – Exclusive Economic Zone

EIA – U.S. Energy Information Administration

EIB – European Investment Bank

EMGF – Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum

EMP – Euro-Mediterranean Partnership

ENP – European Neighbourhood Policy

EP – European Parliament

ESPO – East Siberia–Pacific Ocean

ETT – Energy Transition Theory

EU – European Union

FDI – Foreign Direct Investment

GEST – Global Energy System Transformation

GMP – Global Mediterranean Policy

IAEA – International Atomic Energy Agency

IEA – International Energy Agency

IMF – International Monetary Fund

IR – International Relations

LNG – Liquified Natural Gas

MENA – Middle East and North Africa

MIP – Multiannual Indicative Programme

MoU – Memorandum of Understanding

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NDC – Nationally Determined Contributions

NFWE – Nexus for Food, Water and Energy Program

NPP – Nuclear Power Plant

OEC – Observatory of Economic Complexity

ROSATOM – Russian State Atomic Energy Corporation

RSCT – Regional Security Complex Theory

SIS – State Information Service (Government of Egypt)

SUMED – Suez–Mediterranean

TEI – Team Europe Initiative

UK – United Kingdom

US – United States

USA – United States of America

USD – US Dollar

USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics / Soviet Union

1. Introduction

The Russia-Ukraine war caused significant changes in global geopolitics, especially in the global energy sector (Tampubolon, 2022). With the European Union (EU) rapidly distancing itself from Russian gas imports, which used to be a cornerstone of its energy mix, the bloc has found itself in urgent need of alternative energy suppliers (RePowerEU, 2022). While the EU has invested in renewables to achieve energy autonomy, it remains dependent on energy imports to meet demands. Moreover, European countries lack the natural resources to establish a fully self-sufficient internal energy market (Damen, 2023), therefore, the EU is seeking new markets and suppliers to import energy from. This suggests a broader shift in strategy, where the EU aims to shape emerging energy markets, enhancing its influence in other countries and securing more predictable energy relationships, rather than simply seeking new suppliers to replace Russia.

Egypt has become a key element to this energy strategy (SIS, 2025). As Africa's largest energy producer and most populous nation, it offers a growing market and also a strategically positioned energy hub. Egypt is located in a geopolitically important point, connecting Africa, the Middle East, and Europe through the Suez Canal. Moreover, it already possesses a well-developed energy infrastructure, including liquified natural gas (LNG) export terminals, cross-border pipelines, and a growing renewable energy capacity. It is also a member of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), further emphasizing its regional importance. Egypt faces serious challenges with its energy transition to renewables, grid capacity and domestic logistics, where foreign assistance is needed, and also valued by the political leadership. These assets make Egypt an attractive partner for the EU, both in terms of logistics and strategic importance.

However, the EU is not the only actor competing for influence. Alongside Turkey, China, and the US, Russia has a long-standing interest in the Egyptian energy market. Having lost much of its European energy market due to sanctions and political isolation, Russia turned to Africa to reassert its global energy relevance. Although several international actors, such as China, Turkey, and the United States, are involved in Egypt's energy sector, this thesis focuses on the EU and Russia because they represent the most structurally contrasting and consistently engaged external powers in this sector. Both actors have developed long-term strategies to Egypt, and their respective energy partnerships reflect broader geopolitical visions.

While Russia's presence is rooted in bilateral, state-led infrastructure deals that project hard power and long-term strategic alignment, the EU has focused on market integration and sustainable energy transitions through development cooperation and a mix of bilateral and multilateral

initiatives. These different strategies make the EU and Russia an ideal choice to understand the range of external strategies toward Egypt. This leads to the research question of the thesis, which is the following:

How are the EU's and Russia's geopolitical and strategic motivations reflected in their respective approaches to Egypt's energy sector?

In order to provide a detailed answer to this question, both countries' strategies are analyzed in case studies, taking into consideration long-term policies related to foreign affairs and energy, as well as current energy sector initiatives in Egypt. By comparing the two cases, main similarities and differences are examined. This provides us with an understanding of the different geopolitical tools used by great powers, while aiming to achieve the same goal, which is to gain influence over a country's energy sector. By examining the tools, objectives, and limitations of both actors, the thesis sheds light on how energy policy serves broader strategic aims.

While other countries are also active in the East Mediterranean region, none of them show such levels of geopolitical ambition, energy sector leverage, and institutional engagement to the extent that both the EU and Russia do. Therefore, Egypt is a geopolitical crossroads where the interests of global and regional powers converge. Alongside the EU and Russia, the US, China, Turkey, and Gulf states are also seeking to expand their footprint in Egypt's energy sector. Despite this intense competition, Egypt remains underexplored in academic literature as a contested site of energy diplomacy and great power rivalry.

2. Background

2.1. General Context

Until 2022, the EU-Russia relations were defined by a mix of cooperation and growing tensions. The two actors' mutual economic and energy interdependence was the basis of the relationship, with the EU serving as Russia's biggest trade partner (EC, 2024). However, the relationship between the EU and Russia has undergone a structural transformation in recent years, since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Historically, energy has been a cornerstone of EU-Russia relations, as Russia was the EU's largest supplier of fossil energy resources. In 2021, the EU's energy mix consisted of 45% Russian imports, with 108,1 million tonnes of crude oil, 91 million tonnes of petroleum products and 51,4 million tonnes of coal (Kardas, 2023) imported from Russia. However, the war and Moscow's weaponization of energy have altered this dynamic, with the EU seeking a rapid shift

away from Russian energy dependency. Parallelly, after the increased sanctions from the EU, Russia also turned to other markets in Asia and Africa (Government of Russia, 2020), in order to fill the gap the EU left in its revenue streams.

The EU's energy policy goals

The key goals of Brussels's strategy are cutting revenues from Russia in order to provide less resources for Moscow to fuel its invasion on Ukraine, and to create a stable, and sustainable energy market for itself (EP, n.d.). In response to the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the EU launched the *REPowerEU* plan, aiming to phase out Russian fossil fuel imports by 2027. This initiative led to reductions in Russian energy imports, and by 2024, Russian natural gas imports to the EU had dropped by 75%, with coal and most oil imports nullified (REPowerEU, 2022). These shifts reflect a strong commitment from the EU's part to move away from Russian energy imports. The plan also put into motion a broad energy diversification process within the EU, which emphasizes the development of renewable energy infrastructure both inside and outside of the EU. Currently, the EU's energy policy aims to ensure a secure, sustainable, and competitive energy system in the EU, with instruments such as the *Energy Union Strategy*, the *European Green Deal*, and the *Fit for 55 Package* (EP, n.d). The key objectives of the energy policy include reducing greenhouse gas emissions, increasing energy efficiency, and integrating renewable energy sources into the EU's internal energy mix.

While it would be ideal to achieve self-sufficiency, the EU's member states face different natural conditions and energy capacities, making it impossible to achieve full energy autonomy within the short- and mid-term (Damen, 2023). Therefore, the EU aims to secure stable and preferably renewable sources of energy imports, for which it establishes strategic partnerships with states rich in renewable resources (Clean Energy Transition, n.d.) In this context, Egypt and the wider Eastern Mediterranean and MENA region have become attractive due to the abundant solar, wind, green hydrogen and natural gas reserves, as well as their geographical location, located close to Europe, with already existing energy infrastructure for transportation (Smith-Pastukhova, 2024).

Despite the EU's efforts to move away from Russian imports, energy remains central to EU-Russia relations as the EU continues to prioritize renewable energy development and diversification of suppliers to ensure long-term security and sustainability.

Russia's energy policy goals

The current Russian energy policy is shaped by the *Energy Strategy of the Russian Federation for the Period Until 2035* (Government of Russia, 2020), which highlights the importance of connecting foreign policy and energy strategy, aiming to diversify foreign partners. Historically, oil and gas export revenues contributed 30-50% of the federal budget (Yermakov, 2024), which makes the energy sector a crucial element of the Russian economy.

Russia is a global energy exporter, exporting nearly half of its primary energy production, and up until 2022, its primary market was the EU (EIA, 2022). However, due to the change in the EU's partnership with Russia, the energy strategy had to redirect its focus to seek new markets. The policy states that maintaining stable relations with traditional energy consumers, such as Europe, is still crucial, but it is important to secure new markets for Russian energy exports. The Strategy identifies Africa and the Middle East as priority regions for expanding the leverage of Russian energy companies (Government of Russia, 2020). We can see that the Russian energy strategy promotes the geographic diversification of energy exports to reduce dependence on European markets, encourages foreign investments and the global expansion of Russian energy companies through bilateral cooperations, and supports the export of Russian energy technologies, such as nuclear power technology and uranium enrichment, to reinforce Russia's global leadership in the energy sector (Government of the Russian Federation, 2015).

Russia shows interest in Africa, which is underlined by its extensive nuclear energy projects across the continent (Ferris, 2024). Russia is a key investor in Africa, especially through nuclear energy and military engagements. Currently, Russia is involved in nuclear energy developments in more than 15 different African states, according to the World Nuclear Industry Status Report 2024. In Egypt, Russia is developing the El Dabaa nuclear power plant (World Nuclear Association, 2024a), which is a project of crucial importance for Egypt. In the context of increased nuclear energy cooperation with Africa, we can see that Russia's nuclear program in Egypt is a piece of a broader strategy aiming to secure stable relations and export markets across the continent.

Egypt's International importance in the global and regional energy markets

Egypt is the most populous Arab nation and is located in the northeast corner of Africa, situated in the overlap area of three different regions, namely, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East, and North Africa. Egypt leverages its strategic geographic location as a gateway between Africa, Asia, and Europe with the Suez Canal remaining as a vital asset for global shipping routes. Egypt is also an important energy transit route, with extensive energy infrastructure, such as the SUMED (Suez-Mediterranean) gas pipeline, transiting gas from Gulf States to Europe, or the Arab Gas

Pipeline, which connects Middle Eastern countries with the EU and Turkey (EIA, 2019). Moreover, the GREGY interconnector, currently under construction, will connect Egypt and Greece directly, which means a closer tie to European markets (Energypress, 2025). Other than gas pipelines, Egypt also counts with advanced liquefied natural gas (LNG)[1] facilities, which provide an advantage for energy transit and export, as they are not dependent on pipeline infrastructure (Egypt Oil&Gas, 2021). hese LNG facilities strengthen Egypt's role as a reliable alternative route for regional energy flows, increasing its strategic importance. Other than fossil fuels, Egypt has significant natural resources for renewable energy generation, such as solar, wind and green hydrogen, which position the country as a major point of renewable energy investments (R. Cohen-Helwa, 2025). Both natural gas and renewable energy expansion have been a key point in the EU-Egypt energy cooperation, with the EU becoming a significant importer of Egyptian gas, as well as providing support for Egypt's renewable energy developments (DG NEAR, 2024).

In addition to renewables, Egypt is also currently expanding its nuclear energy capabilities, with Russia's state-owned energy company, the Russian State Atomic Energy Corporation (ROSATOM). ROSATOM is developing the project, providing both financial and technical assistance for the construction. Nuclear energy has long been a goal for the country, working towards its development from the 1950s (World Nuclear Association, 2024b), therefore, Russia's investment in the country has a strong significance for Egypt (SIS, 2025). The construction of the El Dabaa nuclear power plant (NPP) commenced in 2022, and is expected to be fully operational by 2030 (AhramOnline, 2024). Russia will provide direct technical assistance to ensure the correct use in the first 10 years of the operation of the NPP, and is contracted to provide nuclear fuel for the full life-cycle of the NPP, which is approx. 60 years (Nuclear Engineering International, 2025). Nuclear power is expected to contribute to energy stability and economic growth by providing a stable, low-carbon electricity source (Keppler, 2024). The El Dabaa project also reflects Egypt's broader energy strategy, aiming to diversify the electricity generation mix, as it has been historically reliant on natural gas and oil.

Since 2016, the country has undergone extensive economic reforms, including structural adjustments supported by the IMF and development partners like the World Bank and the EU. These reforms have aimed to stabilize its macroeconomy, attract foreign investments, and diversify its industrial base. Key sectors driving economic growth include construction, manufacturing,

[1] LNG is natural gas, converted into liquid form to ease its storage and transport. It is not considered a renewable energy source, although it is important to mention that it is cleaner than most fossil fuels, therefore, many experts categorize it as a transition fuel, that helps bridge the gap as states advance to net-zero energy systems.

energy, tourism, and logistics. Foreign direct investment (FDI) trends have been on the rise since 2010, with a minor disruption in 2020-2021 caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (World Bank, 2023a). Egypt aims to attract foreign investments, especially for large-scale and technology-intensive projects, such as the development of its new administrative capital, the nuclear program, green hydrogen development and electricity grid modernization (DOS, 2023). Egypt was the 3rd largest recipient of FDIs in the Arab world in 2021 (DOS, 2023), which is attributed to its geostrategic location, and optimal regulatory context. In 2017, Egypt adopted Law 72/2017, the infamous Investment Law, that has improved the business climate in the country (DOS, 2023).

Despite progress in economic reforms and infrastructure development, Egypt faces challenges such as high inflation rates, poverty affecting approx. 30% of its population (World Bank, 2023b), and external shocks from regional conflicts impacting revenue streams, especially the Suez Canal. For example, the Houthi disruptions on shipments travelling through the Red Sea have caused serious damages for Egyptian LNG shipments, therefore, for Egypt's revenue streams (EIA, 2024). Another key challenge to Egypt is its growing population (SIS, 2023a), as its number of habitants exceeds 110 million (World Bank, 2023b). Egypt is the 4th most populous country in Africa, and has been experiencing a rapid growth in population, with 1.5% annual increase (World Bank, 2023b). This growth creates pressure on the country's infrastructure, resources, and energy supply. Urbanization and industrial expansion further contribute to rising electricity consumption, making energy diversification a priority for the government. Due to its growing population and expanding economy, Egypt also has higher energy demands (IRENA, 2024). Cairo, Alexandria, and other major urban centers require vast amounts of energy for residential, industrial, and commercial use, necessitating long-term strategies to maintain stability in supply and pricing. Egypt has been historically reliant on fossil fuels, especially natural gas and oil, but the country has been diversifying its energy mix to enhance energy security and sustainability. This diversification includes investments in renewable energy and nuclear power, as described above. Given the global shift towards climate friendly energy sources, Egypt has committed to develop its renewable energy potential and decrease fossil fuels in its electricity mix.

2.2. Literature Review

The following literature review adopts a thematic structure to map the state-of-the-art of EU–Russia energy relations, focusing on how energy geopolitics and diplomacy have developed in the context of global transformations. The EU-Russia relations have attracted a considerable

amount of academic attention, especially in topics such as the EU's internal energy security, and Russia's weaponization of energy resources. However, there is a growing need to examine how this rivalry extends beyond Europe's borders, especially in strategic regions like the Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa. This literature review explores key academic contributions that frame the EU and Russia as energy actors, and geopolitical competitors, who seek to expand their influence abroad. The literature review provides a thematic basis to highlight the relevance of investigating Egypt as a case study in the broader context of EU-Russia energy competition.

Siddi (2018) examines the EU-Russia post-Cold War energy relations through the two actors' tools to expand their influence over neighboring regions. Identifying Russia as a geopolitical power and the EU as a regulatory power, the study demonstrated the different tools the EU and Russia tend to use in their energy diplomacy, arguing that both of them are evolving in a way that resembles the other actor's tools. Ultimately, Siddi argues that the evolution of the EU-Russia relationship is one of the biggest drivers for the European energy transition, underscoring the significance of the topic. Although the research does not take Egypt into consideration, it lays a strong foundation on the context of the EU-Russia geopolitical rivalry. Busygina (2017) also studies the tools leveraged by the EU and Russia in their geopolitical competitions in the Eastern Neighbourhood. Although Busygina studied the common neighbourhood, which includes post-Soviet states, such as Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, his insights on the underlying logics of influence can be applied to the EU-Russia energy diplomacy competition in the Eastern Mediterranean and North African regions. Busygina emphasizes that while these countries lack economic weight, their strategic value lies in their role as a stage for coalition-building and geopolitical signaling. Russia's influence is rooted in historical, cultural, and infrastructural ties, but what is more important is the leverage Russia has over these states due to energy dependency. This researches provides useful context in terms of how states build asymmetrical relations with host countries, highlighting the importance of energy sector investment. Moreover, it also identifies the East Mediterranean as a key region where geopolitical interests intersect, strengthening the relevance of the current research.

Dördüncü and Zeynep (2024) underlined the strategic importance of the East Mediterranean region, framing it as a hub for new energy discoveries. Their study underlines the importance of that the EU expands its energy diplomacy over regions in Africa as a way to diversify its resources from Russia. Although the research presents the EU's interest in the East Mediterranean, it fails to point out the most strategic points, where the EU needs to strenghten its energy diplomacy efforts, not does it acknowedge the diverse group of international actors involved in the region's energy security issues. To continue, Elgendy (2022) also supported the importance of the Eastern

Mediterranean region, but also highlighted Egypt as a crucial actor in the region, as it is becoming an increasingly more relevant energy hub. The study details Egypt's strategy to position itself as a regional energy hub, especially after discovering the Zohr gas field. The paper describes how Egypt became a key export route for regional gas, particularly to Europe, by leveraging its LNG infrastructure. It also brings attention to Egypt's growing role in green and blue hydrogen, making the country a strategic energy hub for both fossil fuels and renewables. This is highly relevant for the current thesis, as it brings attention to Egypt, and frames it as a strategic point, not only because of its location in the intersection of Africa, Europe and the Middle East, but also for its vast energy resources.

It is also fundamental to highlight previous research tackling the EU-Russia geopolitical competition in Africa. Vines (2019) examines the EU-Russia rivalry taking place in Africa, comparing the different tools they use and strategic sectors the two actors engage in. Vines also points out that the main difference in the EU's approach is the normative element, while the Russian approach puts more emphasis on geopolitical and economic interests, rather than institutional reforms and governance elements. The paper identifies Sub-Saharan Africa as the most contested region in the EU-Russia rivalry in Africa, and underlines security cooperation as the main sector through which their strategic competition is most visible and should be analyzed. While this paper present the EU as an equal-level competitor with Russia, Paczyńska (2020) argues for a Russian dominance in Africa. Her research presents Moscow's geopolitical strategy in Africa as a continuation of the Soviet-era engagement, with a major emphasis on military cooperation, and Russian political influence. While the research argues that the Russian economic influence in Africa, gained through trade and investments, are minor compared to US or Chinese engagements, its military presence on the continent is growing. Russia has been increasingly involved in influencing elections in African states, and as of 2019, has signed 21 military cooperation agreements. Altough this element is not in the key focus in the thesis, it is important to acknowledge it as part of the broader context of the EU-Russia competition.

While a significant volume of literature has examined EU-Russia energy diplomacy and competition, much of this research was centered on the internal EU energy market, its dependency on Russia, and the strategies implemented by the EU to diversify sources. Therefore, these studies mostly focus on the EU's efforts to reduce dependency on Russian energy imports in response to increasing geopolitical tensions and/or Russia's perceived hostility. In the existing literature, the emphasis tends to be on energy security, market diversification, and regulatory developments within the EU, framing Russia as a threat to internal stability rather than a competitor in neighbouring regions.

However, studies that position the EU as an external geopolitical actor on the same level as Russia are less common. Moreover, studies that explore the EU-Russia rivalry through a geopolitical lens in areas like the Eastern Mediterranean and Africa is even more lacking, despite the strategic importance these regions hold in global energy transitions. This is why, my thesis aims to fill this gap by analyzing the EU-Russia energy rivalry in Egypt, a strategic country where both actors are actively seeking to gain influence through energy diplomacy. By focusing on how energy is used as a tool of foreign policy and geopolitical positioning, this study contributes to a broader understanding of external energy relations and the EU's evolving role as a global actor.

3. Theoretical Framework

The research tackles how the European Union and Russia seek to influence the Egyptian energy sector, aiming to provide an overview of their respective geopolitical motivations and tools employed. Therefore, the theoretical framework of the research must underline the strategic importance of Egypt's energy market and reflect on the geopolitical and regional motivations behind Russia's and the EU's strategies.

It is important to clarify that this research does not primarily focus on Egypt's domestic energy market dynamics, and it does not aim to simplify the situation in Egypt's energy sector to an EU–Russia standoff, given there are other global powers involved. Rather, the study aims to highlight how global powers use energy investments as a tool to expand their regional leverage. Moreover, the research sheds light on the global dynamics in energy-sector geopolitical competition, connecting the EU-Russia competition to the global energy transition struggle between fossil fuel and renewable energy powers. Egypt is an ideal choice to examine the geopolitical competition between the EU and Russia, given they are both heavily involved in Egypt's energy market. Moreover, the recent natural gas field discoveries, as well as its renewable energy production potential make the country central to energy-related FDIs. Therefore, the growing importance of Egypt as a regional energy hub positions it at the center of intersecting strategic interests, which makes for a well-documented, yet understudied case in the Academic world.

In order to present both Russian and EU influence on Egypt, through its energy sector, this research applies the *Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT)*, which offers a regional lens, tackling the penetration of external actors into local energy infrastructures and policy environments. RSCT is applied to conceptualize Egypt as part of overlapping interest zones, where energy investments are increasingly tied to geopolitical influence. However, RSCT alone does not capture the global structural shifts that influence the strategies of the EU and Russia. As a secondary theory to

complement the regional angle with a more global one, the thesis also draws on *Energy Transition Theory (ETT)* to account for the distinct strategies pursued by the EU and Russia. This theory offers a broader lens to analyze how global shifts, such as the decarbonization agenda, and changing energy demand, affect the behavior of big powers. ETT helps to contrast the EU's emphasis on renewable energy and sustainable development, and Russia's focus on fossil fuel exports as a tool of geopolitical leverage. The following Figure illustrates the application of the theories to the layers of the EU-Russia geopolitical competition in the field of energy diplomacy.

While RSCT explains *why* and *how* regional powers interact within a specific geopolitical context like Egypt, ETT provides insight into *what drives* the different approaches of the EU and Russia in a global sense. The EU's focus on sustainable energy and climate action contrasts with Russia's continued reliance on fossil fuel exports as an instrument of geopolitical influence. Together, the two theories allow for a layered analysis that connects regional dynamics with global ones, making them complement each other for assessing the complexities of EU-Russia competition over energy influence in Egypt. The following figure illustrates the logic behind the dual application of ETT and RSCT in the research.

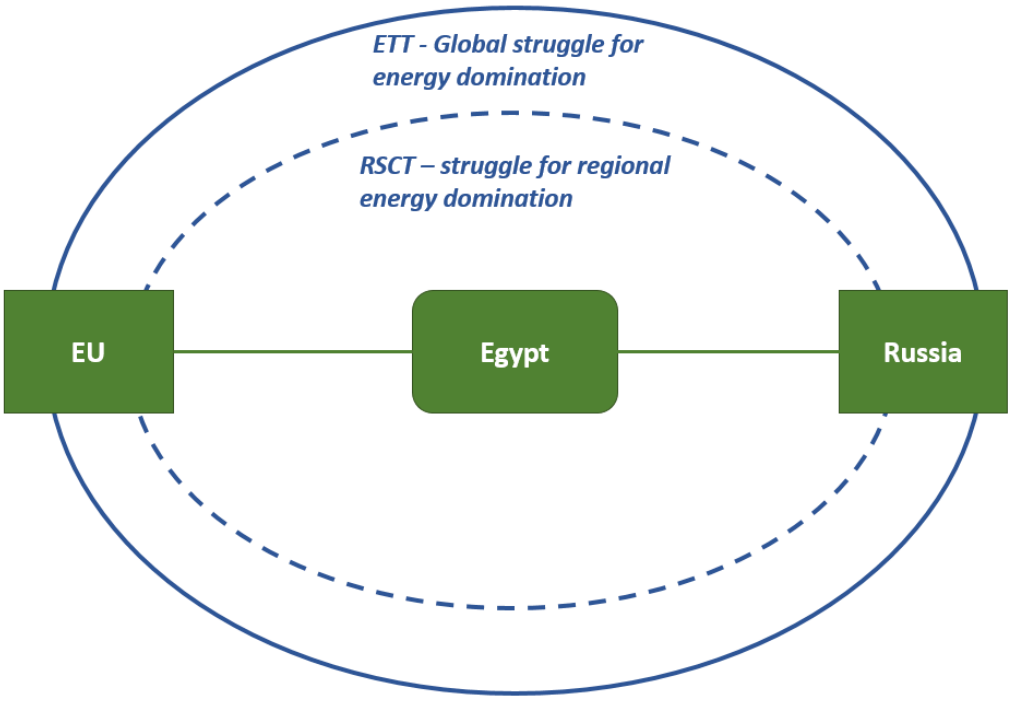

Figure 1: Visual presentation of the thesis's Theoretical Framework

The application of both RSCT and ETT allows the research to explore how great power competition plays out within regional structures, highlight the strategic role of energy diplomacy in shaping

regional influence, and evaluate the effectiveness of the EU's and Russia's energy strategies in a competitive geopolitical environment. The research aims to answer the following research question:

How are the EU's and Russia's geopolitical and strategic motivations reflected in their respective approaches to Egypt's energy sector?

The study aims to contribute to discussions on foreign energy policies in the Eastern Mediterranean region, and also to broader debates on how global powers employ energy policy as a tool for regional influence.

3.1. Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT)

The Regional Security Complex Theory argues for the interconnected nature of security concerns, highlighting the importance of analysing smaller level cases instead of only global ones, such as regional, iter- or sub-regional cases, to understand bigger regional and global dynamics. Developed by the Copenhagen school's Buzan and Wæver, the theory departs from traditional, state-centric models. However, the RSCT defends that while the international system is anarchic, security interactions tend to concentrate geographically, creating different regions. As the most meaningful patterns of security interdependence occur at the regional level, states' security concerns become so interconnected that they cannot be resolved independently of one another. This idea highlights the importance of researching specific country cases, as they tend to reflect broader regional trends and can offer valuable insights into the dynamics of interdependence and the ways in which regional security configurations shape global politics.

The theory states that international security is shaped by a 1+4+x distribution (Acharya, 2007), in which 1 is the USA, considered the central global security actor. Its global military power, economic influence, and political leadership mean that it plays a dominant role in shaping international security, therefore, its strategic actions and alliances have a ripple effect on global security dynamics, and its power impacts many other regions. The following grouping (4) contains the four major regional powers, namely the EU/Europe, Russia, Japan and China. These countries are dominant in shaping regional agendas, and their actions have leverage over the regions attributed to their interest zones. While they have competing interests in various global and regional issues, they also cooperate when it aligns with their strategic goals. The last part of the distribution (x) is the category for the rest of the world, countries and regions that have a more limited influence on global security. Their security dynamics are shaped by the interactions and decisions of the major

powers (USA and the 4 group), possessing less capacity to shape the broader international security environment, but they are affected by the security structures created by the major powers (Jarząbek, 2019). Therefore, x-category countries often become areas of great power competition, where dominant actors like the EU and Russia compete for influence. These regions are not primary shapers of global security but are strategically important, making them key battlegrounds for geopolitical rivalry. In this framework, Egypt is considered an x-category country, where the EU and Russia compete for influence through energy sector investments. Egypt's categorization into the x-category can be debated given its control over the Suez-canal, which is the one of most important global shipping routes (Notteboom et al., 2022). However, with international regulations limiting Egypt's direct influence on the canal, as well as the country's dependency on external actors for investments and technological assistance in the energy sector suggest that Egypt's geopolitical role is more regionally concentrated than globally dominant. The following figures illustrates the 1+4+x distribution in the context of the current thesis.

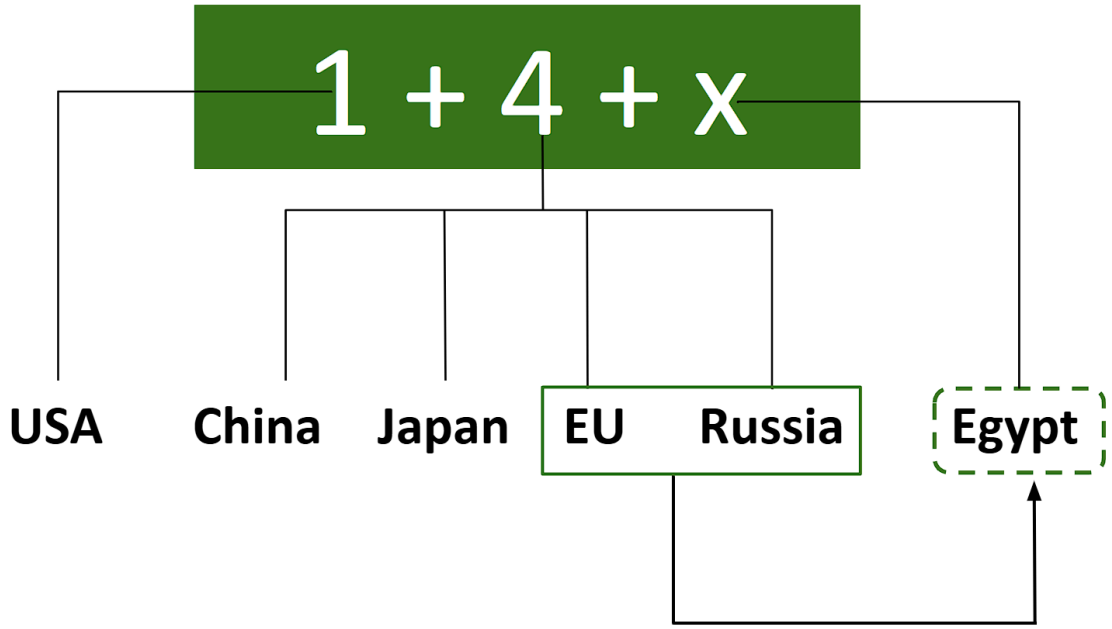

Figure 2: Illustration of the 1+4+x distribution provided by RSCT in the context of the thesis

Based on this categorization, the theory also differentiates between three types of regional spaces, namely overlay regions, which are solely shaped by outside forces, unstructured regions, where regional interactions are not sufficient to generate solid structures of interdependence, and finally, regional security complexes (RSCs). These regions are at the level where the interstate links are so close, their securities cannot be considered separate from each other (Acharya, 2007). Egypt can be understood as part of an overlay region, where external powers play a heavy role in shaping

security. Its geographic position at the crossroads of Africa, the Middle East, and the East Mediterranean makes it a strategic gateway for projecting power into these regions.

In addition, RSCT introduces the notion of penetrating powers, which are external actors, typically great powers or global institutions, that intervene in a regional complex to influence its internal security dynamics. These actors may seek to stabilize, reshape, or exploit regional relationships to align with their own strategic interests. Penetration can occur in different forms, such as through military presence, economic investment, promotion of ideology or norms, and institutional partnerships (Jarząbek, 2019). RSCT also puts an emphasis on the interplay between regional interconnectedness and external intervention, which makes it suited to analyze contemporary geopolitical competition, where great powers increasingly project influence through direct engagement in strategic sectors and strategically located regional systems. As an example, the Soviet Union's involvement in Egypt in the 1950s can be understood as a great power penetrating into a strategic sector in order to spread its influence into the region. By supporting Egypt with military, and later technical assistance related to the Czechoslovakia Arms Deal and the Ashwan High Dam development, the Soviet Union managed to step foot in the region and made Egypt a strong point of Arab Socialism. We can see that engaging in strategic sectors in one x-category country contributed to spreading Soviet influence in the region, as later on other countries also developed stronger ties with the USSR, such as Syria, Iraq and Algeria (Şafak, 2024).

In the context of the study, Egypt is framed in the center of a regional security complex, as it is situated at the intersection of several overlapping regions, including the North African, Eastern Mediterranean, and Middle Eastern complexes, as well as the EU's Southern Neighbourhood. This overlapping positioning makes Egypt a strategic point, where multiple global and regional powers seek influence. Therefore, energy diplomacy in Egypt cannot be only viewed through bilateral lens, but as part of a broader struggle for regional influence within a complex geopolitical landscape. By applying RSCT, the study frames Russia and the EU as competing penetrating powers, both of them seeking to grow their regional influence through Egypt. Previous research has highlighted the contrast between how Russia and the EU aim to gain influence. Russia's main tool is pressure tactics, such as the creation of instability, using energy supplies as leverage, and making deals based on short-term interests. In contrast, Busygina finds that the EU focuses on building stability by offering economic support, encouraging countries to follow EU rules, and promoting long-term partnerships based on shared values and conditions (Busygina, 2017).

However, adopting a black-white perspective on what tools the EU and Russia use to gain more influence in the region would be redundant. Referring back to Siddi (2018), it has been proven that

the two actors tend to evolve in a responsive way, as they adopt strategies that are typically applied by the other actor. As such, Siddi highlights that the EU started adopting geopolitical strategies in the energy sector to become more independent from Russia, while the latter started using legal and market instruments in a similar way to the EU. However, it is important to bring attention to the structural challenges that the EU faces when competing for geopolitical influence in other regions. As the EU is a one-of-a-kind international organization, its decision-making process is more time-consuming and challenging, due to the differing opinions of the EU Member States. Moreover, the EU has a highly institutionalized and bureaucratic foreign policy approach (Dembinski, 2024), which is especially relevant when contrasted with the centralized decision-making capacities typical of authoritarian regimes like Russia. This complexity makes the EU's foreign policy significantly more difficult to implement compared to Russia's, whose centralized governance structure allows for more rapid and decisive action.

Therefore, RSCT provides a framework for understanding why both actors treat Egypt as a focal point for strategic investment and engagement, especially as the regional energy architecture becomes increasingly central to broader geopolitical competition. By applying RSCT, we can situate energy politics within the regional power dynamics, rather than treating Russia's and the EU's involvement as isolated policy engagements. The theory highlights how energy infrastructure and partnerships have become instruments of power influence, especially in states like Egypt that occupy key geopolitical positions.

3.2. Energy Transition Theory (ETT)

To complement the geopolitical and regional perspective offered by the Regional Security Complex Theory, this thesis also applies Energy Transition Theory (ETT) to frame energy as a dynamic field of global transformation, not only as a strategic asset. This theory offers a critical lens through which we can understand how the global shift from fossil-based to low-carbon energy systems reorganizes political and economic structures, and redefines geopolitical relations. ETT explores the shift from fossil fuel-based energy systems to renewable energy sources, underlining how the global shift toward renewable energy reshapes power dynamics between states. Through the reduction of fossil fuel dependence, countries' ties to fossil fuel exporters also reduce, creating a new area for geopolitical competition. ETT highlights how states leverage energy innovation and supply chain control, such as green hydrogen and critical raw materials, to gain strategic advantages and reshape global influence.

As Kuzemko et al. (2025) argue, the world is undergoing a Global Energy System Transformation (GEST), which is shaped by social and political decisions, driven by institutions. GEST refers to the large-scale shift from fossil fuel-based energy systems to renewable ones, which brings a significant changes in how energy is produced, distributed, and consumed globally. Unlike traditional energy geopolitics, which focuses mainly on fossil fuel trade and fixed resource locations, ETT highlights the importance of policy choices, economic structures, and institutional actions in shaping energy systems. These systems are constantly evolving in response to changing political, technological, and social conditions.

A central contribution of ETT is the idea of the *material reconfiguration of energy systems*, arguing that the world goes from reliance on fossil fuels to the growing role of renewables, critical raw minerals, and energy storage technologies. This shift is not only technological, as it also involves the creation of new infrastructures, value chains, and political alliances related to the energy sector. As fossil fuels lose their central role, the geopolitical influence of traditional energy-exporting nations is also declining. Meanwhile, countries that invest in renewable energy technologies and clean energy innovation are increasingly positioned to gain geopolitical positions. Therefore, ETT highlights how the global energy transition is also a reorganization of the international order, with deep implications for global politics, trade, and economic structures (Kuzemko et al., 2025).

Energy Transition Theory provides a useful framework for analyzing how external actors influence the direction of national energy systems through competing transition pathways. These pathways refer to different trajectories towards energy transformation by political agendas and geopolitical interests, as well as economic and technological opportunities. In the case of Egypt, these pathways reflect contrasting models of energy development promoted by the EU and Russia. The EU has been supporting Egypt's energy transition through investments in renewable energy projects, highlighting technology transfer aimed at modernizing the country's energy grid and storage systems. These initiatives contribute to Egypt's decarbonization goals and also aim to reduce its dependence on fossil fuels. However, in the fossil fuel sector, Russia maintains significant influence through the El Dabaa nuclear project in Egypt. By fostering renewable development, the EU positions itself as a key partner in Egypt's energy future while strategically limiting Russian leverage in the region.

By applying Energy Transition Theory, this thesis frames energy diplomacy not only as a reflection of geopolitical competition but also as a struggle over the direction of energy systems themselves. This perspective helps explain why energy cooperation agreements, infrastructure deals, and renewable energy partnerships carry deeper strategic meanings, beyond economic exchange. It also sheds light on how external powers embed themselves in the long-term evolution of Egypt's energy

system, seeking to shape the future trajectory of the country's infrastructure, regulatory environment, and market orientation.

Together with RSCT, Energy Transition Theory provides a layered framework to examine how external powers influence energy policy in a regional context, while also engaging in broader struggles over the future of global energy governance. This dual approach enables the research to capture both the strategic and systemic dimensions of energy politics in Egypt, and to assess how the EU and Russia, as ideologically and institutionally different actors, seek to embed themselves in Egypt's energy transition for long-term geopolitical gain.

4. Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological framework employed to investigate the interplay between energy sector investments implemented by the EU and Russia in the Egyptian energy sector in order to provide an overview on how the two actors aim to expand their influence in the region. The research seeks to provide an overview of the EU's and Russia's strategies in the Egyptian energy sector, shedding light on their broader regional goals in the East-Mediterranean/North African region.

Given the active presence of both the EU and Russia in the Egyptian energy sector, a comparative case study method was chosen to provide an in-depth analysis of their geopolitical strategies and foreign policy tools regarding energy diplomacy. The comparative approach is ideal to show how each actor leverages energy investments to build strategic partnerships with Egypt and secure long-term access to their energy resources and infrastructure. Egypt is an ideal case given its strategic geographic location, role as a regional energy hub, and growing its importance in energy markets.

4.1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative comparative case study design focused on the EU's and Russia's involvement in Egypt, with the aim to assess how they pursue their geopolitical and strategic objectives through their engagement in Egypt's energy sector. This thesis employs a *Most Similar Systems Design comparative case study approach* to identify strateguc parallels and divergences in the EU's and Russia's motivations and tools employed. The case of EU and Russia are similar because both are great powers competing for influence in Egypt's energy sector within the same geopolitical context. However, they differ in their foreign policy strategies and instruments. This

research design allows for a focused analysis on how different foreign policy strategies and instruments result in distinct approaches to influence, despite sharing similar geopolitical contexts and objectives. This enables a better understanding of how the EU and Russia pursue their geopolitical and strategic goals through their engagement in Egypt's energy sector. The EU's involvement is examined through official development frameworks, bilateral cooperation instruments, climate and energy policies associated with the RePowerEU initiative and flagship projects. In parallel, the study explores Russia's energy cooperation with Egypt by analyzing key policy and strategy documents, as well as flagship initiatives such as the El-Dabaa nuclear power plant.

The case of Egypt was chosen due to its strategic geopolitical relevance in the East-Mediterranean and North African region and its evolving role as an energy hub. Egypt maintains long-standing relations with both the EU and Russia, who are currently competing for influence through energy investments and strategic partnerships in Egypt. Although multiple external actors, such as China, the United States, Turkey, and the Gulf states, are active in Egypt's energy sector, this study focuses specifically on the EU-Russia dynamic. This choice is based on the EU's perception of Russia as a geopolitical threat. In contrast to other actors, Russia's growing energy and strategic influence in Egypt poses direct implications for the EU's energy security and foreign policy interests. Broadening the scope to include all external players would exceed the limits of a thesis-length study, therefore, this research focuses on the EU-Russia relationship to provide an in-depth overview on how the two actors compete for influence through strategic investments in the energy sector of Egypt.

This research focuses on the period from 2015 to 2025, a decade marked by significant geopolitical and energy-related shifts that directly impact the EU's and Russia's engagement with Egypt. The 2015 migration crisis highlighted the EU's growing interest in stabilizing its neighbouring regions, including North Africa, to manage external pressures caused by mass migration. At the same time, tensions between the EU and Russia intensified, first due to the annexation of Crimea and later culminating in the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. This which led the EU to reduce its dependency on Russian energy import, which forced Russia to seek alternative markets and strengthen its energy partnerships with other countries, such as with Egypt. Parallelly, the EU increased its efforts to diversify energy sources and invest in renewable energy cooperation, positioning Egypt as a key partner due to its geographic location, LNG infrastructure, and renewable energy potential. Major developments, such as the signing of the El Dabaa nuclear power plant agreement in 2017 and the launch of the EU's REPowerEU strategy, further justify this timeframe by highlighting how Egypt became increasingly central to both actors' strategic energy objectives during this period. Opting for

a longer historical perspective would be less relevant, as this specific decade captures a very dynamic and politically significant phase in EU-Russia-Egypt energy relations.

To conduct the analysis, this study applies *qualitative content analysis* to examine policy documents, official agreements, academic and policy literature, and relevant media sources. The aim is to identify and compare the main tools, strategic goals, and types of energy technologies promoted by the EU and Russia in Egypt's energy sector. The findings from the content analysis are then interpreted through the theoretical framework, helping to assess how the empirical evidence connects to the theories. This provides insights into the broader strategies reflected by the tools applied by the EU and Russia in their respective energy diplomacy approaches in Egypt.

4.2. Data Collection Methods

Given the comparative case study design, the data was gathered from a combination of primary and secondary sources to provide a better overview of the EU's and Russia's approach towards expanding their respective influence over the Egyptian energy sector. The research mostly relies on primary sources, such as strategic and policy communications, development project documents and reports, which provide a good understanding of the EU's goals and instruments applied in the matter.

However, due to the lack of transparency regarding the Russian El Dabba NPP project in Egypt, as well as the scarcity of publicly available natural gas trading data from both the EU's and Russia's side, secondary sources tackling these topics are taken under the scope of the study. Secondary sources include policy reports, official communications, and academic literature. It is important to mention that access to official Russian data is significantly constrained as many Russian official websites and reports are unavailable to access. Given the challenges of data availability and accessibility, especially regarding Russia's strategy and its nuclear investments in Egypt, the research also draws on journalistic sources and policy analyses. Moreover, as the researcher does not speak Russian, all Russian-language sources used have been translated in online translating tools, such as DeepL. Native Russian speakers have also been consulted regarding the translations, especially the parts relevant to the thesis, aiming to ensure the reliability of translations.

Use of AI tools

During the course of this research, I made use of different AI-tools to support non-substantive aspects of the work. These included assistance in locating relevant sources, such as statistics and policy papers from Russian institutions, which were at times more effectively accessed through

AI-search results than directly through the official Russian platforms. Additionally, AI tools were used to help manage citations and formatting bibliography entries in accordance with academic standards. As English is not my native language, I also employed language support tools such as Grammarly to refine sentence structures and improve fluency, particularly when translating content or adapting expressions to sound more natural to an English-speaking audience. Understanding that AI tools can give incomplete or biased information, sources suggested by AI-tools were carefully checked against official government websites, reports, and trusted academic publications. This helped me avoid missing important information or relying on incorrect data. Although AI tools made parts of the research easier, the information was always verified and cross-checked to keep the thesis accurate and reliable.

4.3. Limitations and Considerations

Several limitations have been identified during the development of the study, related to the scope and depth of the research. Firstly, the limited access to Russian primary resources must be underlined, which is especially relevant when discussing the El-Dabaa nuclear project and broader Russian strategic communications in Egypt. Russia's approach to information sharing is less transparent than those of the EU, and many official resources remain inaccessible due to language barriers, cybersecurity protocols, or geo-restrictions.

Secondly, the scope of the research is limited to the flagship energy projects funded or supported by the EU, as well as flagship energy projects undertaken by Russia. While these examples are representative of broader strategic trends, they do not encompass the entirety of energy competition occurring in Egypt. Thirdly, while the research focuses on the EU and Russia as primary actors, other stakeholders are also present in the geopolitics of Egypt, such as China, Turkey, the US and the Gulf states. While these countries also play important roles in Egypt's energy sector, they fall outside the core comparative scope of this thesis.

Another limitation of this study is the potential overemphasis on Egypt's role within the broader geopolitical competition. While Egypt is undoubtedly a strategically important actor, framing it as the central battleground for influence between the EU and Russia for gaining influence over the Eastern Mediterranean, North African and partly the Middle Eastern regions may risk overstating its significance. The regional dynamics of energy geopolitics extend beyond Egypt, involving multiple other actors and intersecting interests across these regions. Therefore, this study does not claim that control or influence over Egypt alone determines the outcome of wider regional power shifts.

Lastly, although the combination of Regional Security Complex Theory and Energy Transition Theory provides a strong analytical basis, it also excludes other potentially useful aspects to be examined, such as the influence the EU and Russia can leverage through norm diffusion and/or institutionalism, which could provide a more holistic approach for the research. However, due to the length and resources that a thesis project allows, the study prioritizes a focused analytical lens over a multi-theoretical approach.

5. Analysis

This chapter analyzes the strategies and tools Russia and the European Union employ in Egypt, in their evolving geopolitical competition over influence in Egypt's energy sector. The research question of the thesis is:

How are the EU's and Russia's geopolitical and strategic motivations reflected in their respective approaches to Egypt's energy sector?

In particular, the study explores the dynamics of strategic diversification and energy diplomacy in the context of increasing multipolarity in the Eastern Mediterranean region.

Building on the theoretical foundation of energy transition theory and regional security complex theory, this chapter traces how the EU and Russia aim to consolidate their influence through energy infrastructure investments, policy coordination, soft and hard power tools. The analysis is structured around three main pillars. First, the chapter presents a brief examination of Egypt's strategic positioning in the global energy landscape. Second, it evaluates Russia's current (2015-2025) energy strategy in Egypt, with a focus on state-led projects such as the El Dabaa nuclear power plant and its broader political-economic implications. Third, it scopes the EU's approach in the same time frame, assessing its efforts to promote renewable energy sources. A final subchapter synthesizes the findings, identifying similarities and differences, challenges, and the broader geopolitical significance of Egypt as a contested energy partner. Throughout the chapter, the theoretical frameworks of ETT and RSCT are consistently applied to both cases. The comparative analysis at the end presents a more detailed picture of the EU-Russia geopolitical competition, highlighting the global and regional objectives they pursue in Egypt, and the tools applied for their respective strategies.

Approach

The analysis adopts a qualitative, descriptive approach to provide a context-specific assessment of the EU's and Russia's operations in the energy sector of Egypt, to see what their activities imply for regional and partially global power dynamics. The application of the theoretical framework, namely, the Regional Security Complex Theory and Energy Transition Theory, serves as a guide for interpreting the data and linking micro-level energy projects with broader geopolitical intentions. While RSCT provides the regional lens, situating Egypt within overlapping influence zones, ETT complements this by offering a global perspective on energy system transformations, highlighting the global significance of energy transitions. By combining descriptive case study analysis with theory-informed comparative interpretation, the study explores how the EU and Russia pursue their geopolitical and strategic objectives through their involvement in Egypt's energy sector, showing how energy developments serve as tools of geopolitical influence and expressions of structural power.

In the following subchapters, the nature and extent of Russian and EU influence in Egypt's energy sector is examined. Influence, in the context of this study, refers to a foreign actor's ability to shape a host country's decisions and development pathways through sustained engagement, such as strategic investments, diplomatic agreements, or development projects. To explore this, official strategy documents, governmental publications, media coverage, and reports on Russian and EU energy investments in Egypt are analyzed. The aim is to assess the two actors' underlying motivations, demonstrating how they seek to gain leverage in Egypt's energy sector and identifying the tools employed to achieve their geopolitical goals.

5.1. Egypt as a strategic energy hub

Under the understanding of RSCT, Egypt is positioned in overlapping security complexes, such as the Middle East and North Africa. Moreover, Egypt has become a rising energy hub in the East Mediterranean and African regions, with both natural gas and renewable energy forming a crucial part of its energy profile. As the 14th largest producer of natural gas globally (IEA, 2022) and the second in Africa (Business Insider, 2025; IEA, 2022), Egypt's production has followed an upward trend since 2015. The country is now the third-largest African exporter of natural gas (LNG Industry, 2023), which highlights its growing relevance in the international energy market. In 2024, Egypt has discovered several gas fields in the Mediterranean, and is developing offshore gas fields that further strengthen its natural gas production (Abbas et al., 2020). Some of the most important offshore gas fields are Zohr, Atoll and Noor, and they contribute to enhancing the strategic role of Egypt in the regional energy markets (Abbas et al., 2020). This contributes to the strategic significance of the

country in terms of energy investments and cooperation, as they count with a vast amount of key resources in the energy sector.

The development of LNG technology and infrastructure has enhanced Egypt's energy trading capacity. Previously, Egypt was more dependent on regional gas pipeline infrastructure, which is operated by external actors. However, Egypt's LNG plants in Idku and Damietta have allowed it to expand its export routes and act as a more flexible supplier, especially in times of regional disruption (Ahmed, 2021). This is a desirable aspect in international energy trade, as regional conflicts, such as the Russia-Ukraine war in Europe, can cause significant disruptions in energy supplies. LNG presents flexibility as it can avoid natural gas pipelines, which strengthens Egypt's role as a strategic transit and export point, situated at the crossroads of Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. Moreover, with increasing LNG exports, Egypt has become an important exporter for many countries, in both Europe and the Asia-Pacific, including Spain, Italy, South-Korea and China (EIA,2022). However, these countries stand with a better position in energy security, therefore, it is important to mention smaller exporters, however, with bigger dependency on Egyptian exports. Some of the countries in the region that depend on Egyptian energy exports include Libya and Sudan, but it is also important to underline that Egypt has a strong potential for the future electrification of Sub-Saharan Africa (Tanchum, 2020).

Through the lens of RSCT, Egypt's LNG capacity weakens Russia's influence over Europe, as this technology offers an alternative route for energy flows, which is completely independent from Russia. The EU's goal to move away from Russian energy exports strengthens Egypt's position as an energy hub, as it is an optimal alternative supplier for the EU, given its strategic location at the crossroads of three continents. While strengthening the EU's energy independence from Russian imports, under ETT it can be argued that the enhanced trade of LNG shifts the focus from renewable energy development to fossil fuels. By focusing on natural gas explorations and financing the related infrastructure for the new gas fields in the Mediterranean, Egypt slows its energy systems transition process (Abdallah et al., 2022). On the global scale, this is a disadvantage for the EU's renewable investments as it could set back deeper integration with the EU's green energy agenda and weaken the coherence of the EU's external energy transition strategy.

Moreover, it is important to highlight Egypt's strategic position in the regional energy value chain, as Egypt's energy infrastructure is highly integrated into regional frameworks. Egypt operates the Suez Canal and the Suez-Mediterranean (SUMED) Pipeline, which are important infrastructures for international energy markets. By becoming a natural gas exporter, with increasing geopolitical importance, Egypt positioned itself as a competitor to Russian natural gas. As Russia is advancing its

military efforts in Ukraine, it needs revenues, which it gets mostly from natural gas. With a growing Russian naval presence in the Mediterranean (NATO, 2025), it can be argued that Egypt's pipeline infrastructure is in constant threat of Russian sabotage. Moreover, Russia's positioning increases its leverage over the EU's energy security, as witch increased military presence in the Mediterranean, Moscow can threaten energy flows to Europe in times of higher geopolitical tensions. From the RSCT perspective, this dynamic reflects how Egypt became a contested area for influence between external powers. Russia's presence in the Mediterranean, as well as its investments in Egypt's nuclear energy sector show a dual strategy of penetration to the region, with a combination of economical and military power projections. This enables Moscow to influence the regional balance and challenge the EU's strategic objectives of distancing itself from Russian gas imports.

Other than natural gas explorations, Egypt has demonstrated a strong commitment to renewable energy and climate change mitigation. In the context of the UNFCCC's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC), Egypt has set a target for renewables to make up 42% of total installed electricity capacity of the country by 2035, with intermediate milestones by 2030. To achieve this goal, Egypt adopted a series of national policies and initiatives, committing to renewable energies. The initiatives include the Integrated Sustainable Energy Strategy 2035, Nexus for Food, Water and Energy program (NFWE), and Vision 2030 (Government of Egypt, 2023). Moreover, the country's geographic and climatic conditions are highly favorable for solar and wind energy production, and it is emerging as a hub for green hydrogen production. National strategies like Egypt's Vision 2030 and the Integrated Sustainable Energy Strategy 2035 outline goals to diversify the energy mix and increase the share of renewables in electricity generation. While these initiatives demonstrate Egypt's commitment to green energy transformation, the realization of these ambitions remains dependent on extensive infrastructure investments. These investments are both expensive and require new technologies, which brings the need to involve external partners who possess the necessary resources for the development of renewable energy infrastructure (Abdallah et al., 2022). Through the lens of RSCT, this offers the EU an optimal point of penetration, as renewable energy technology presents a gap in the Egyptian energy sector, which the EU can fill in through development projects and loans. By targeting the country with several programs related to renewable energy technology solutions, the EU positions itself as an influential power in Egypt, laying the groundwork for broader regional outreach and strategic presence.

Despite its strategic position and political will, Egypt is facing significant structural challenges in the energy sector. A large-scale, nation-wide energy transformation requires advanced technology, technical expertise, and financial resources that Egypt currently lacks (Rashed, 2025). As a result,

external actors like the EU and Russia play a fundamental role in shaping Egypt's energy landscape, as they possess both the technological capabilities and financial resources to drive large-scale energy transitions. Therefore, Egypt's energy ambitions unfold in a context where domestic capacity intersects with international influence, making it a critical point of geopolitical competition.

5.2. Russian influence in the Egyptian Energy Sector

5.2.1. Russia-Egypt relations: a short overview of relations

To understand the strategic logic behind Russia's current energy investments in Egypt, it is important to examine the broader historical and geopolitical context of the Russia–Egypt relations. This overview demonstrates that Russia's growing energy influence in Egypt is not a recent or isolated development, but part of a long-standing pattern of strategic engagement that dates back to the Soviet era. Through RSCT it can be argued that their relations have historically evolved as a regional security complex penetration, where the USSR embedded itself in the Arab world first through its engagement with Egypt. By tracing how Russia has used tools like infrastructure investments, military cooperation, and ideological alignment to cultivate ties with Egypt, this section helps clarify how energy diplomacy has become a key pillar of that relationship today.

The relationship between Russia and Egypt dates back to the Cold War era and has generally been characterized as friendly. In a historical comparison, Hamzawy and Ji (2024) discuss the parallels between the foreign policy strategies employed by the Soviet Union in the 20th century and those used by Russia today to expand its influence in Egypt through energy diplomacy, military cooperation and trade. In both cases, Egypt has served as a strategic gateway into the broader Middle East and North Africa region. One of the first moments of alignment between the two nations came in the 1950s, when Egypt's then-president Gamal Abdel Nasser turned to the US to purchase weapons in order to counter Israeli incursions into Egypt. However, the US and the West rejected this request; therefore, Nasser turned to the Soviet Union to secure an arms deal. This shift resulted in the infamous Czechoslovak Arms Deal, through which Egypt bought Soviet weapons to support its efforts against Israeli attacks. Moscow also supported Egypt diplomatically, backing Egypt in international forums such as the United Nations, particularly during key moments like the Tripartite Aggression in 1956, triggered by Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal (Hamzawy-Ji, 2024).

However, their relations were not limited to political support, as the Soviet Union also assisted Egypt in major infrastructure projects since the late 1950s. In 1958, Moscow offered support for the

construction of the Aswan High Dam, which was a stalled project because of the lack of Western support. Due to political differences, in 1956, the US and UK withdrew financial support for the Dam's construction. The Soviet leadership under Nikita Khrushchev offered 100 million USD in aid and technical assistance for the dam, which came to symbolize Soviet-Egyptian collaboration for national development, while consecutive arms deals reinforced Soviet endorsement of Nasser's independent path in regional politics. In 1964, Khrushchev personally visited Egypt to commemorate the completion of the dam's first construction phase. During this era, Cairo emerged as a symbolic center of Arab socialism, heavily influenced by Soviet development models (Hamzawy-Ji, 2024). Other strategic investments by the Soviets included the Nag Hammadi aluminium smelter and the Helwan steelworks, which projects both involved technical assistance and technology transfer to strengthen Egyptian industries (Lavrov, 2018). Although the Soviet-Egyptian relations slowed down under Sadat, in the mid-1980s they started to normalize again; however, it also lost its intensity, with no major developments or events to be mentioned under this period. This is due to the broader historical context of the relations, as the Soviet Union was dealing with internal struggles and focused more on the arms race with the US, than its geopolitical expansion in the Middle East (Purat-Bielicki, 2018). Nevertheless, in 1991, Egypt was the first country to establish diplomatic relations with Russia after the disintegration of the USSR (Lavrov, 2018), which shows the long-term stability of their relationship.

We can see that the Soviet Union recognized the strategic importance of Egypt, and deepened their partnership through investment, military support, and ideological alignment. The reasons behind seeking the strategic partnership have mainly been geopolitical. First, Egypt's control of the Suez Canal granted access to vital trade and military routes connecting Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, making it essential for global shipping flows. Second, as the most populous and influential Arab nation, Egypt held considerable influence in regional politics, especially in the context of Arab nationalism and the Arab-Israeli conflict, contextualized within the US-Soviet Cold War standoff. Third, Egypt's distancing from the West after the 1950s revolution and its refusal to align with Western military blocs positioned Egypt as a counterweight to Western dominance in the region. Lastly, the Middle East's big amount of oil reserves and Egypt's role in accessing them offered the Soviets an opportunity to gain leverage over energy supplies challenging Western economic interests (Purat-Bielicki, 2018).

The Cold War-era engagement laid the foundation of Russia's current approach, which similarly blends economic, military, and geopolitical strategies to maintain influence in Egypt and the wider region. Since 2013, the Russian-Egyptian relations have started to intensify again under the

presidency of el-Sisi, as the Egypt-US ties have cooled down due to the political shift. Since 2014, Egypt has secured a number of arms deals with Russia, purchasing fighter jets and air defense systems, as well as securing more infrastructure projects for Egypt, such as the development of the country's first commercial nuclear plant. In contemporary foreign policy, Russia has reaffirmed Egypt's strategic importance. In its *2023 Foreign Policy Concept*, the Russian government explicitly identified Egypt as a key partner in the Islamic world, emphasizing the aim to deepen the multifaceted and mutually beneficial partnership with Islamic states (Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). The document highlights the importance of deepening cooperation with these states, while respecting their political systems and cultural values. This shows a commitment to non-normative strategic partnerships driven by mutual benefits.

Although the focus of the thesis is energy cooperation, it is important to mention that military cooperation remains a cornerstone of the Russia-Egypt relations. Russia is currently Egypt's largest arms supplier, though Cairo aims to balance its partnerships by maintaining strong ties with the EU and the US at the same time. It is also important to mention trade relations, as Egypt is Russia's largest importer of wheat, which has intensified since the disruption of Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Hamzawy-Ji, 2024). One year after the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Egypt imported 2,55 billion USD value of wheat (OEC, 2023), which was significant in the context of global sanctions on Russia. Highlighting these aspects is crucial, as they show that while Russia's energy cooperation with Egypt may lack the multifaceted sectoral and institutional depth of the EU's approach, the cooperation it is contextualized in a broader strategic partnership that encompasses military and trade dimensions too.

Beyond trade and defense, the most important area of the current collaboration is energy infrastructure investments, more specifically the Egyptian nuclear project with the El Dabaa Nuclear Power Plant, developed in partnership with Russia's state company, Rosatom. The project fulfills Egypt's long-standing goal to access nuclear energy and also illustrates Russia's ongoing role in shaping Egypt's strategic infrastructure. In this context, Egypt has become a critical point within Russia's global strategy, particularly in the energy domain, which is formalized in policy documents.

5.2.2. Russian Foreign Policy Goals Related to Energy

The foundation of the current Russian energy policy is the *Energy Strategy of Russia for the Period up to 2030*, which was originally issued in 2020 and later revised in 2023. While the document dates back to before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it already anticipates the potential for growing geopolitical isolation. Therefore, it acknowledges the future need for reorientation of the Russian

economy, moving away from energy-intensive sectors and towards high-tech, knowledge-intensive industries, while still maintaining a dominant position in global energy markets. As of the early 2020s, Russia remained a major energy power, accounting for approximately 12% of global oil production and controlling 45% of the global market for uranium enrichment[2]. This positions Russia as an uncontested nuclear superpower. The strategy also acknowledges the volatility of global oil prices and the increasing politicization of energy markets. In response, it sets out mitigating strategies, such as reinforcing its global leadership in nuclear energy, and forming more stable and diversified energy relations with traditional energy-importing partners, such as Europe and Egypt. Although the strategy admits Russia's limited role in renewable energy, it expresses an intent to develop this sector in the long term (Government of Russia, 2023). Under RSCT, this strategy can be understood as Moscow's attempt to achieve regional influence in overlapping security complexes by establishing strong presence in the energy sector, aiming to buffer against political isolation. At the same time, with ETT it can be argued that Russia's strategy shows a fossil-fuel power aiming to maintain relevance and counter the spread of renewable energy systems through large scale non-renewable[3] energy developments.

In broader foreign policy terms, the Russian energy strategy expresses a critique of the growing politicization of energy, although it simultaneously employs energy as a geopolitical instrument. It seeks to strengthen the global leverage of Russia's leading energy companies, engage in regional initiatives, and participate actively in international negotiations on energy governance. The diversification of logistical infrastructure, such as the Nord Stream pipeline, the East Siberia-Pacific Ocean (ESPO) pipeline, the South Stream project, and the Baltic Pipeline System, all illustrate Russia's broader ambition to ensure flexibility and strategic depth in its export routes. However, most if this infrastructure establishes connections to European markets, which have moved away from Russian gas imports since 2022. Because of this, turning to Egypt and other markets in the Global South has become an alternative strategy for Russia. Although there are no direct pipelines to North Africa, Egypt provides access to new energy networks in Africa and the Mediterranean. This fits into Russia's plan to build stronger energy ties outside Europe, and it can potentially push Russia to work more closely with Egypt as part of a wider shift towards the Global South, more specifically Africa.

[2] The data provided here is from the policy document, other sources have been consulted the percentage is around the same. An energy research consultancy, Thunder Said Energy, claims that 40% of global uranium enrichment takes place in Russia (Thunder Said Energy, 2023).

[3] It is important to note that nuclear is not considered fossil energy, neither renewable, the correct categorisation is grey energy. Non-renewable was chosen to maintain a streamlined use of terms along the thesis.

As part of Russia's energy goals is expanding its technology and securing stable markets for Russian energy products, it is crucial to highlight its presence in the broader energy markets, advancing nuclear energy in several African countries. In 2024, Rosatom participated in the African Energy Chamber and African Energy Week conferences as gold sponsor, highlighting the crucial role it plays across the energy sectors in Africa. With more than ten African countries exploring nuclear energy potential, there is a heavy reliance on international partnerships, including those with Rosatom (Kachkova, 2024). Currently, Russia has signed agreements and MoUs with over 20 African countries, including Algeria, Ghana, Ethiopia, Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Sudan, Tunisia, Uganda, and Zambia. The nuclear deals range from the construction of large-scale nuclear power plants to the development of floating nuclear power plants and small modular reactors, tailored to the different energy needs and infrastructural realities of African nations. From the perspective of RSCT, Russia's nuclear energy cooperation with a number of African countries showcases its strategy to establish itself as a long-term partner in these regional complexes. Through ETT, is can be argued that Russia's promotion of nuclear energy in Africa is an effort to hape the direction of their energy transitions, countering renewable energy system transitions driven by the EU.

In the context of Egypt, this strategic agenda plays out through Russia's efforts to expand its positions in energy infrastructure, particularly through nuclear cooperation. Rosatom's involvement in the construction of Egypt's El-Dabaa Nuclear Power Plant underscores how energy collaboration is used as a tool for strategic geopolitical engagement. Therefore, in examining Egypt-Russia energy relations, it is crucial to view infrastructure developments as manifestations of Russia's evolving foreign policy and its pursuit of regional influence through energy diplomacy.

5.2.3. Russia-Egypt energy cooperation

The most notable example of Russia's infrastructure-driven foreign policy towards Egypt is the construction of the El Dabaa Nuclear Power Plant (NPP). With Egypt's rising population and consequent growth in electricity demand, the nuclear project is important for meeting domestic needs and diversifying the national energy mix. Nuclear energy is a stable and low-emission energy source, and it provides a crucial complement to Egypt's existing energy infrastructure. The nuclear project has historical roots, as Egypt has been pursuing the integration of nuclear energy to its national energy mix since the 1950s, by first establishing the regulatory and academic framework to achieve this goal. Although a research reactor was built, the construction of commercial NPPs was not implemented by US and French partners, first due to political reasons, as Egypt secured closer

ties with the USSR, and secondly, because of the Chernobyl accident in the 1980s, thus nuclear energy lost significant civil support (Government of Egypt, 2023). However, as safety measures were strengthened in the following years, Egypt resumed the national nuclear program in 2007, seeking foreign aid to provide technological expertise in the field. Finally, in 2017, Egypt officially signed an agreement with Russia for the construction of the El Dabaa NPP (Hamzawy-Ji, 2024). This project marks a significant milestone in Egypt's energy development, as it represents the country's first market-oriented nuclear power facility. Moreover, the diversification of the energy mix is crucial for energy security, especially amid transitioning to renewables, which can still cause market volatility due to the lack of energy storage infrastructure and extreme weather conditions.

In order to understand Russia's interests in the nuclear program, some details of the cooperation need to be assessed. The contract between the government of Egypt and the Russian state-owned energy company, Rosatom was signed in 2017. Although the original text of the contract is not available for the public due to its sensitive nature, the outline of the main stipulations could be gathered via different international atomic energy agencies and news outlets, such as World Nuclear News, IAEA, and Nuclear Engineering International. According to the contract, Rosatom is responsible for the construction of the plant and related facilities, the training of personnel and plant maintenance for the first 10 years of operation, which will be parallel with technology transfer to local operators (World Nuclear News, 2024). However, some experts call for caution regarding this element of the contract, as it raises questions about operation sovereignty. To put it simply, there is some concern about Russia handing over the NPP, but still de facto operating the key to it, which would give Russia some level of influence over Egyptian exports and market decisions (Balfour, 2021). Moreover, Rosatom will supply nuclear fuel for the NPP's lifecycle, build and operate a waste depot, and take back the used nuclear fuel to Russia for reprocessing. Additionally, Russia is constructing local manufacturing facilities in Egypt, which aim to produce components for the plant (Hamzawy-Ji, 2024). The project is estimated to cost approx. 30 billion USD, and is financed primarily by a 25 billion USD loan from Russia, which covers 85% of the total cost. The financial arrangement is particularly significant, given Egypt's ongoing foreign currency crisis and high sovereign debt risk. Egypt will have to repay the loan over 35 years, with the remaining 5 billion USD expected to be paid through the revenues from selling the electricity generated by the plant (Diaz-Maurin, 2024).

Russia's commitment to supplying uranium for the plant highlights the mutual benefits of the cooperation: while Egypt gains technology and a reliable energy partner, Russia secures a new market, and strengthens its geopolitical and economic influence in the region through long-term

energy ties. By securing a 60-year contract to supply fuel and manage waste, Russia ensures a sustained presence in Egypt's critical infrastructure. This embeds Russia deeply in Egypt's energy and security architecture, granting Russia long-term influence, as the contract creates a dependence on Russian technology, expertise, and fuel, essentially a structural reliance. We can see that Russia's strategic investment in Egypt's energy infrastructure demonstrates a deep understanding of Egypt's long-standing need for technological transfer, a gap rooted in the country's historical lack of resources for advanced technological innovation and development. By offering financing, technology transfer and technical assistance, Russia has positioned itself as a power that recognizes the structural weaknesses in Egypt's energy sector.

Moreover, given the weak economic situation of Egypt, Russia's strategic investment in the energy sector creates an asymmetry in the relationship, which could compromise Egypt's decision power in future regional matters. The El Dabaa NPP deal can also provide Russia political leverage in future diplomatic or regional security matters while also strengthening Russia's soft power in the region, providing an alternative to Western technological and developmental assistance. This can be framed as a penetrating power tool to embed Russian influence in the region, aiming to grow this influence outside of Egypt's borders too. From a geopolitical perspective, El Dabaa can be seen as an example of Russia's strategy to gain influence in the region through energy diplomacy. Through mutually beneficial relations, Russia leverages nuclear energy exports not only for financial returns but also for securing long-term political relations. It is important to mention that Egypt also benefits from diversifying its energy partners, especially amid inconsistent US-financed aid. This can be brought in parallel with the Cold War-era logic, where Egypt turned to the Soviet Union for support when lacking help from Western allies. Currently, Russia is positioning itself as a reliable partner a gain, filling the technological gaps/needs of Egypt. We can see that the El Dabaa NPP project is not only a infrastructure investment, but also a strategic tool for Russia to leverage influence in the region. For Egypt, it provides energy stability and enhanced energy autonomy; while for Russia, it provides a gateway into North Africa and the East Mediterranean.

Other than nuclear power, Russia and Egypt have signed agreements on increasing cooperation and trade regarding natural gas, which is an essential element to energy security, as it is proven to be a reliable and stable energy source, although not renewable. The Russian-Egyptian cooperation on natural gas started in 2015, when an agreement was signed to import Russian natural gas, marking the beginning of enhanced energy collaboration. In 2015, the Russian Lukoil company also expanded in Egypt and provided sixth of all oil production in the country (Kremlin, 2015). Gas exports experienced a significant increase from 2015, and although official data is not available on

the exact trading partners, from the increased number of Russia-Egypt official visits and statements, it can be deduced that Russia played a significant role in the increase (CEICdata.com, 2018; Shay, 2018). Currently, Egypt and Russia are negotiating another key agreement to use natural gas as engine fuel in the transportation sector. This includes converting vehicles to run on natural gas, which is part of Egypt's broader strategy to expand its domestic natural gas use (Zaid, 2022).

Outside of the energy sector, it is notable that the Egypt-Russia bilateral trade increased 1 billion USD between 2023 and 2024, deepening economic ties in the agriculture, and industrial sectors (TV BRICS, 2025). The increase can be seen as a product of the Russian invasion on Ukraine and the consecutive sanctions imposed by the EU on Russia. With the loss of one of its most significant markets, the EU, Russia turned to other countries, such as Egypt, to diversify export destinations and secure imports of key goods such as wheat, machinery, and fertilizers, thereby reconfiguring its geopolitical and economic alliances in the Global South.

In conclusion, Russia–Egypt energy cooperation, centered around the NPP project, exemplifies how infrastructure and energy diplomacy can serve as powerful tools of geopolitical influence. The partnership fulfills Egypt's long-standing ambition for nuclear energy, helping to address domestic energy demands, diversify the national energy mix, and reduce dependence on volatile energy markets. For Russia, the deal secures a strategic step to North Africa and the East Mediterranean, embedding itself in Egypt's key infrastructure and expanding its influence in a region traditionally dominated by Western actors. The long-term nature of the nuclear agreement creates a structural dependency on Russian nuclear fuel and technoogy transfer, that could limit Egypt's future policy flexibility in the region. Other than nuclear power, deepening relations in natural gas, trade, and industrial cooperation show us a broader geopolitical alignment between the two actors. With Russia's isolation from European markets following the invasion of Ukraine, Egypt has become a strategic partner in Russia's shift toward strengthening ties with other regional powers. Ultimately, the El Dabaa project and related agreements highlight how energy infrastructure serve not only as a tool for domestic development, but also as a tool to exercise foreign influence, offering mutual gains while also redefining power dynamics in the region.

5.3. The EU's influence in the Egyptian Energy Sector

5.3.1. EU-Egypt relations: a short overview of relations

Similarly to the previous case study, to understand the underlying motivations behind the EU's current energy investments in Egypt, it is important to examine the broader historical and

geopolitical context of the EU-Egypt relations. The overview provides us with an understanding that the current events and investments in the Egyptian energy sector are not isolated developments, but rather a continuation of a policy pattern implemented by the EU. Although it is important to make a differentiation between the foreign policy of the EU and the foreign policy of its Member States, it would be misleading to claim that Egypt's colonial past under European actors, have not had an effect on the EU-Egypt relations. However, the following overview focuses on the evolution of the EU-Egypt partnership, therefore, when bilateral ties are discussed in lesser details, it is to maintain the streamlined approach of the text. From RSCT's perspective, the EU is aiming to penetrate into the overlapping security complexes occupied by Egypt. The EU's involvement in Egypt's energy sector development can be seen as the tool for this penetration. With ETT, we can interpret the EU's strategic presence in Egypt as a broader geopolitical strategy to spread renewable energy system transitions globally, with European technologies and leadership. This helps to situate the EU as a leader in the global energy markets.

After Egypt gained independence from the British in the 1953, its foreign policy became characterized by a mix of anti-imperial nationalism and the Non-Aligned Movement. As mentioned previously, in the context of the Israeli insurgenicies to Egyptian territories, Cairo seeked to purchase weapons from Western powers to protect its territories. However, due to the reluctancy of the US and the British to sell weapons to Egypt, Cairo turned towards the Societ Union. In the infamous Czechoslovakia Arms Deal, Egypt acquired the necessary weaponry from the Soviets, which made Egypt lean more toward them, limiting deeper engagement with Western powers. As a consequence to the Egyptian foreign policy's closer orientation to the USSR, the US and Britain refused to provide the previously promised funds for an important infrastructure project, the Aswan High Dam (Britannica, n.d.). This shows that relations between major European states and Egypt were unstable during the formative years of the European Economic Community (EEC). However, after the Suez Crisis, the dynamics of Egypt's foreign relations began to shift. The joint invasion of Egypt by Britain, France, and Israel in response to President Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal marked a turning point, reinforcing the country's commitment to independence from Europe, emphasizing anti-colonialism, Arab socialism and nationalism. Throughout the 1960s-1970s, Egypt remained closely aligned with the USSR, until the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty in 1979 (Britannica, n.d.), which opened the door for engagement with Western powers, including the EEC.

During this period, the EEC started to show more interest in Egypt, in the context of adopting a more structured approach to its relations with countries in the Mediterranean basin. In 1972 the

Global Mediterranean Policy (GMP) was signed, which was the EEC's first attempt at developing a coherent framework for relations with non-member Mediterranean countries, motivated by concerns over regional instability following the Arab-Israeli conflict, the 1973 oil crisis, and the growing Soviet influence in the Middle East and North Africa (Pomfret, 1992). Egypt, as the most populous Arab country and a key geopolitical actor, was central to this strategy. Through the GMP, the EEC aimed to establish bilateral cooperation agreements with Mediterranean countries, offering trade agreements, financial aid, and technical assistance in exchange for political dialogue and market liberalization. In this context, Egypt and the EEC signed their first cooperation agreement in 1977. This agreement established a vast amount of collaboration sectors between the EU and Egypt, such as economic development, industrialization, modernization of agriculture, science, technology, environmental protection, and infrastructure. It highlighted the importance of joint efforts to support Egypt's development plans and encouraged regional cooperation, especially regarding trade (Cooperation Agreement EU-Egypt, 1978). This agreement is important to consider, not only because it is the first of many, but also because it demonstrates the EU's strategy of focusing on of supporting and strengthening existing initiatives within partner countries. This approach continues to shape the EU's external relations today. According to RSCT, these agreements can be seen as the EU's attempt to stabilize its southern neighbourhood by integrating Egypt into a Euro-Mediterranean security and economic complex, therefore limiting external (especially Russian) influence.

The Cooperation Agreement of 1977 (Council of the European Communities, 1978) paved the way to a more deep engagement, encompassing political relations as well. This development was brought by the launch of the Barcelona Process in 1995. This initiative, also known as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), aimed to strengthen political, economic, and social ties between the EU and Southern Mediterranean countries. For Egypt, the Barcelona Process offered a platform to deepen its engagement with Europe, particularly through trade liberalization, economic aid, and dialogue on political reforms (Gillespie-Youngs, 2002). In 2001, the EU and Egypt signed the EU–Egypt Association Agreement, creating a free-trade area between the parties through removing tariffs on industrial products and reducing tariffs on agricultural products. Under this agreement, the EU and Egypt established a regular political dialogue to foster mutual understanding and align positions on international issues as well as regional security and stability. The agreement also highlighted the parties' commitment to democratic and human rights values (Association Agreement, 2004), which shows the first steps of the inclusion of normative elements into the relations.

However, the vision of a closer regional integration was challenged by concerns regarding corruption, human rights, and democratic stagnation in Egypt. These concerns increased after the 2011 revolution. While the EU initially welcomed the democratic process of the Egyptian people and stated its support for political transition, the Egyptian military's coup in 2013 and the rise of President el-Sisi distanced the EU, leading to a more cautious EU approach (Gugan, 2013). Despite criticisms of human rights abuses, the EU continued to cooperate with Egypt in areas of mutual interest, especially in migration management and energy security, given the strategic importance of these sectors for the EU. It can be stated that the 2013 coup marked a shift in the EU's approach to Egypt, driving it into a more pragmatic partnership (Dworkin, 2024).

Currently, the EU and Egypt continue to engage through a pragmatic framework, structured by a complex framework of policies and cooperation agreements. The *European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)* is the main instrument of the cooperation, which tackles three main areas in its implementation projects, namely economic development, security and migration. From the related *Team Europe Initiative (TEI)* programs and Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP), we can see that the EU aims to help Egypt advance in key areas such as sustainable mobility, digitalization and renewable energy connectivity (EEAS, 2021). The special element of the ENP is its collaborative approach as it directly supports partner country initiatives that align with the EU's foreign policy goals. For example, the ENP, through the TEIs and MIPs support already existing Egyptian initiatives, for example, Egypt's *Vision 2030* and *Integrated Sustainable Energy Strategy 2035* (Ministry of International Cooperation - Energy, n.d.). This collaboration directly supports partner country initiatives that align with the EU's foreign policy goals, which helps avoid the question of sovereignty, as the investments are domestically driven, allowing partner countries like Egypt to maintain a sense of ownership over the EU-funded initiatives in the country. From the perspective of the RSCT, the EU's approach can be understood as a strategy to penetrate into the East Mediterranean/North African region through Egypt. With the collaborative approach taken, the EU applies more soft power tools to gain influence over the Egyptian energy market. By supporting Egypt's renewable energy transition and infrastructure development, the EU aligns local interests with its own energy diversification and decarbonization goals. At the same time, these investments can be interpreted through ETT, as they also shape the path of the Egyptian energy sector development. With the promotion of renewable energy, the EU uses energy transition as a tool to gain more influence in the region. This is done through technology exports and regulatory harmonization, that ties partner countries, such as Egypt, to the EU.

Although not officially stated, from the repeated mention of its importance in official policy documents, it can be deduced that the EU's engagement with Egypt is mainly motivated by concerns regarding migration. Ensuring Egypt's stability is seen as essential to preventing future migration crises. Regarding energy investments in renewable energy, energy security serves a dual purpose: it helps Egypt adapt to climate change and positions it as a future energy partner for the EU, which is actively seeking to reduce its dependence on Russian energy. Therefore, it can be reasoned that the EU's commitment to supporting Egypt in its renewable energy transition is its own energy security goals. By moving away from Russian imports, the EU was left with a big hole to fill in, which generated a renewable energy transition movement in the EU. However, the EU's renewable energy generation capacity has its limits, due to geographical and technical complications. Therefore, in its revised Energy Union strategy, the EU stated to put more emphasis on energy diplomacy, aiming to secure energy imports from other regions, such as North Africa and the Middle East (EUR-LEX 52015DC0080, n.d.). In contrast, Russia's strategy in Egypt emphasizes maintaining and expanding its market share in nuclear power, using energy cooperation as a leverage to sustain its geopolitical influence and counterbalance the EU's presence. This duality shows how both actors use the energy sector to pursue broader strategic objectives, as described by RSCT.

In conclusion, the EU's engagement with Egypt is shaped by a combination of geopolitical, economic, and normative goals. Energy plays a key part in this relationship, combining both countries' interest in the investments: Egypt's growing renewable energy potential and needs are addressed with the EU's financial and technical assistance, while the EU's need to diversify its energy sources in the context of declining reliance on Russian imports is also addressed. Therefore, supporting Egypt's energy transition helps the EU meet its climate goals while also addressing its own energy security concerns. At the same time, broader issues such as migration management, regional stability, and market integration continue to influence the structure of cooperation. The EU's multifaceted approach reflects tits long-term commitment to shaping its neighborhood in a way that aligns with Brussels's strategic interests, with energy cooperation serving as a key pillar of this broader vision.

5.3.2. The EU's Foreign Policy goals related to Energy

The EU's foreign policy goals related to energy have been largely influenced by its relations with Russia. For years, the EU has been reliant on Russian natural gas imports, which exposed Brussels to political pressure, as Moscow used energy as a strategic tool to influence the EU's decision-making. The turning point was Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which highlighted the

vulnerabilities of this dependence forced the EU to urgently rethink its approach to energy security. This shows the concept of energy interdependence as a source of vulnerability in IR, where asymmetric dependence can be leveraged for political gain. The EU's experience with Russia shows how energy can be weaponized, making energy security a central concern of foreign policy.

In response, the EU committed to a dual objective: moving away from Russian energy imports while also accelerating the shift towards renewable energy sources. This reorientation reflects the understanding that energy security is not only an economic concern, but also a strategic geopolitical concern. The EU's renewed energy strategy balances short-term security needs with long-term climate objectives, while also paving the EU's way to global importance in the renewable energy sector. From the perspective of ETT, this change is about altering the geopolitoical landscape by reducing the importance of fossil fuel exporters and positioning the EU as a leader in the emerging global green economy. However, the EU is one of world's biggest energy importer, with 53% of its energy coming from imports, out of which 40% is from Russia (EC, 2015; EEAS, 2022). Therefore, this objective proves to be very ambitious to achieve domestically, as European energy self-sufficiency is constrained by the EU's geographical and resource limitations. Since 2022, energy policy is recognized as a central element of the EU's foreign policy (EEAS, 2022), with climate and energy security considered inseparable from Europe's broader strategic interests. One of the core pillars of the EU's external energy strategy is diversifying energy sources, aiming to broaden energy partnership excluding Russia. By securing energy resources from different countries, the EU aims to avoid creating a heavy dependency on another region, which creates a more stable energy security for the EU. At the same time, the EU is increasing investments in renewable energy technologies and green hydrogen markets, as well as promoting the related regulatory frameworks for the integration of renewables (EEAS, 2022).

Egypt plays an important role in the EU's external energy strategy, given its strategic geographic location and energy resources in green hydrogen, wind and solar power and natural gas. Moreover, Egypt's growing renewable energy sector aligns with the EU's climate and energy transition goals, making it an optimal partner for joint investments and technology transfers in different renewable energy projects. This collaboration helps the EU reduce its reliance on Russian energy imports while also supporting Egypt's Climate commitments and domestic energy security needs. From the RSCT's perspective, Egypt's geographic location at the intersection of Europe, Africa, and the Middle East makes it an important actor in these intersecting security complexes. By deeping relations with Egypt, the EU secures alternative energy sources as well as extending its normative and regulatory influence, strengthening its strategic objectives in the region. At the same time, the EU's energy

cooperation with Egypt is part of a broader foreign policy agenda that includes promoting renewable energy globally, through governance reforms, regulatory alignment, and environmental sustainability. This is a form of soft power tool that the EU uses to project its values and standards in IR to shape the global energy landscape. With this, the EU aims to reinforce its leadership in international climate diplomacy (E3G, 2023).

5.3.3. EU-Egypt energy cooperation

As stated above, the EU-Egypt energy cooperation has a well-structured and planned framework within the European Neighbourhood Policy and related energy policies. The following chapter analyzes specific projects that contribute to the implementation of the energy diplomacy goals of the EU. However, it is important to note that due to the volume of EU projects launched in Egypt between 2015-2025, the chapter highlights flagship projects to best reflect the overarching geopolitical strategy that the EU employs in Egypt's energy sector. Highlighting flagship projects also has the aim to showcase the areas of energy cooperation, in a limited amount of pages. The following figure provides an overview of the areas of cooperation tackled in the chapter.

The EU's involvement in the Egyptian energy sector encompasses both renewable and fossil fuel-related infrastructure investments, however, with a bigger focus on the renewables. As the EU aims to eliminate all Russian gas imports, it is seeking new sources to replace Russian energy in its internal energy market. By creating renewable energy markets for itself, the EU is creating a favourable market connected to the EU in an asymmetrical relationship.

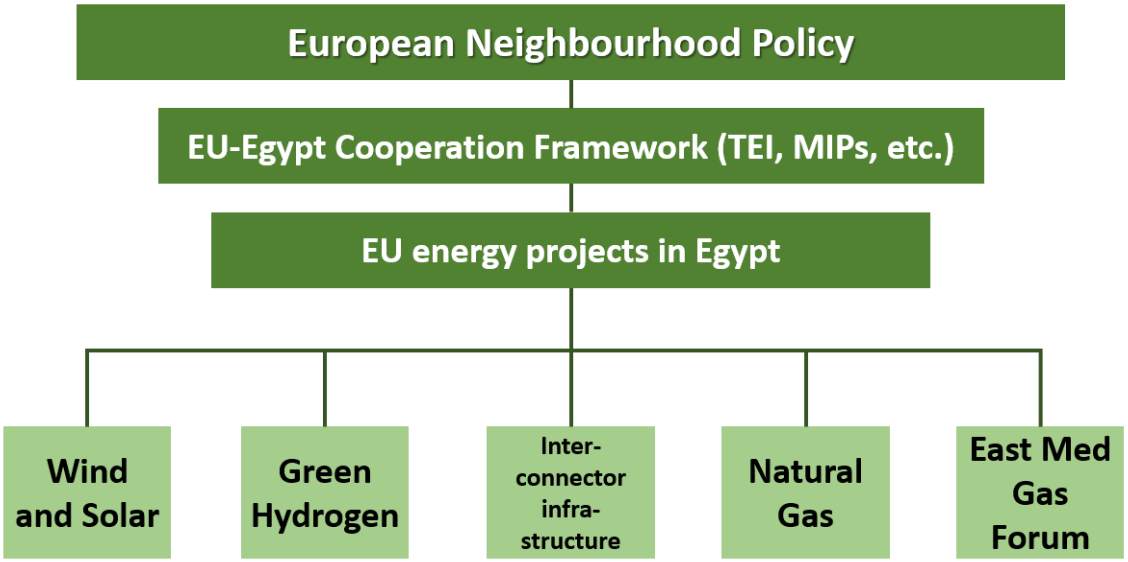

Figure 3: Visual presentation to the EU's instruments and flagship projects applied in Egypt

The EU actively engages in the renewable energy infrastructure development of Egypt. With a vast amount of projects funded by the EU implemented in Egypt in the last 10 years, it is important to highlight some of the most recent flagship initiatives to get a good understanding of the state-of-the-art situation of the different energy sectors supported by the EU in Egypt. Firstly, the EU supports Egypt with the construction of wind and solar parks, most notably the Gulf of Suez Wind Farm, and the Benban Solar Power Park. The Suez Wind farm project was launched in 2017, and aided Egypt with 115 million EUR (10,5 million in grant and the rest as credit). It contributed to Egypt's goal of reaching wind energy to put 12% of its total energy distribution (EIB, 2015). The Benban Solar Power Park project was funded by the EBRD and involved technical assistance to the Egyptian Renewable Energy Authoritiy, capacitating them to be able to perform the necessary environmental and social assessments related to the construction of the solar park (SESA, 2016). The two project examples demonstrate that the EU supports both already existing initiatives in Egypt, and also launches independent projects that are aligned with the national policies of Egypt. It is also important to describe the nature of the help provided by Brussels, as it is aiming to fill the technical and capacity gaps related to the development of said initiatives. This both includes hard infrastructure assistance, such as the construction and setting up of wind farms, and can also include solely technical assistance, training the local experts, which harmonises the expertise leves in Egypt with EU standards. This aspect contributes to the extension the EU-interest zone, by bridging non-tarriff barriers that could effect energy imports between the EU and Egypt, such as the related regulations and institutional capacities. With ETT, we can argue that these investments shape the institutional and regulatory environment in Egypt, aiming to make it more compatible with the EU's energy markets.

Most recently, green hydrogen production has emerged as a major contender in the renewable energy market. Given the planet's abundance in hydrogen, this green-hydrogen provides an easy-to-store and non-polluting energy source. However, both the infrastructure and the production it requires is expensive due to its high-electricity demand for energy generation. Nevertheless, the EU is paving the way in this relatively new renewable energy sector, aiming to become a global player in hydrogen production. It is also a strategic sector among renewables, as it is more effective for electrifying energy-intensive sectors such as steel and tranport industries (Mills, 2025). The EU's green hydrogen production aims also relate to other types of renewables energy investments, as the EU seeks to produce hydrogen where the necessary renewable energy infrastructure is already available, avoiding intensifying more fossil fuel generation (EC, n.d). The EU-Egypt Renewable Hydrogen Partnership is still in a planning phase, building up a vast cooperation framework between the parties, harmonising legislation, performing market and

environmental assessments, before hard infrastrucutre projects are implemented (El-Sheikh, 2022). However, given that a MoU on the partnership has been signed already, and joint statements on the matter have been issued, it can be deduced, that this is a serious commitment and plan from the EU's part. From the lens of ETT, green hydrogen represents an emerging energy sector, critical for the decarbonization of energy-intensive sectors such as steel and transport. Although green hydrogen production is still limited due to its high costs and energy-intensive infrastructure, the EU is investing heavily to become a global leader in the green hydrogen sector. This strategy reflects a transition from niche innovation to systemic integration, with the EU seeking to pave the way of a new critical sector against fossil fuels, where the EU would take place as global contender in this new-technology sector.

Another key area of energy collaboration is the development of energy interconnector infrastructure connecting Africa and Europe. The two flagship projects, that are endorsed and financially supported by EU are the EuroAfrica Interconnector and the GREGY pipeline. It is important to highlight that these projects were not launched by the EU but given their strategic importance to the energy security goals of the Union, they received official support. The EuroAfrica interconnector is supported through the TEI, aiding the construction of the interconnector located between Italy and Tunisia with more than 300 million EUR grant. The project aims to integrate renewable power sources and strengthen energy cooperation between North Africa and Europe, while also supporting Tunisia's renewable energy goals (Onsat, 2024). Similarly, the GREGY Interconnector has the same goal of connecting the continents, however, this time through connecting the energy network of Egypt and Greece. The interconnector will transport electricity between the two countries and from Greece, it will continue to other states in the EU. Given its strategic importance, the EU is supporting the development of the interconnector though financial grants, funding related technical and environmental studies to support the technical aspects of the project. Moreover, the GREGY project was added to the EU's Global Gateway project list (Todorovic, 2024), which further highlights its importance to the EU. This also gives way to Brussels to find more areas where funding could be allocated in the future to aid the project's implementation. With RSCT we can argue that these interconnectors link Egypt and North Africa to Europe's regional security system, both physically and institutionally, making it harder for outside powers like Russia to control energy flows in the region.

Other than renewables, the EU has also deepened its cooperation with Egypt in the field of natural gas trade, as it is a significant source of energy that the EU still needs in the medium-and short term. The intensification of the cooperation was a direct consequence to Russia's invasion on

Ukraine, and was solidified in the MoU signed between the EU in 2022 (EC, 2022), Egypt and Israel, as well as the renewed EU-Egypt Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership agreement in 2024. The goal of the agreements is to create a stable supply of natural gas to the EU, amid its efforts of distancing itself from Russian imports. The MoU also specifies that the supplies can only come from pre-approved countries in the Eastern Mediterranean region, ensuring that the gas exported to Europe is genuinely produced in partner countries like Egypt or Israel, and that is not simply re-exported Russian gas (MoU, 2022). Moreover, Egyptian natural gas has recently gained more attention from the Union, as some gas fields in the East Mediterranean region, such as the Zohr gas field, were only discovered recently (EP, 2024). Given Egypt's scarcity in the necessary technology and financing to fully develop these resources independently, the EU has seen an opportunity to secure alternative energy supplies in Egypt. Brussels's interest also generates a significant income for Egypt, as well as more resources to ensure that the Egyptian national energy demand is met. Currently, LNG is the most significant energy trade sector between two countries, and for Egypt, the EU is the most significant export destination, with Europe representing approx. 70% of its total natural gas exports (Egypt Today, 2024).

Amid the growing importance of the Eastern Mediterreanean gas reserves, a cooperation platform was formed between the region's countries. The East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) is a diplomatic platform to address energy security, economic development, and regional stability, while also providing a forum for peaceful resolvement of disagreements amid ongoing geopolitical tensions (EMGF, n.d.). Said geopolitical tensions originate from debated exclusive economic zones (EEZ), where multiple countries have claims over the economic rights to retrieve gas. Given that Turkey is not part of the forum, the EMGF can be framed as a coalition of countries, aiming to counter Turkey's expansion in the region. The EU's statements on the issue support this theory, as the Union has called Turkey's exploration of natural gas reserves in debated EEZs illegal (Branislav, 2020). The EU has an observant status in the cooperation, which allows it to influence the discussion and policy direction of the Forum. The EU's involvement in the EMGF also shows that the EU considers the Eastern Mediterranean a key region to secure alternative sources of natural gas, amid its distancing from Russian imports. Its permanent observer status also allows for promoting the inclusion of renewables into the Forum's agenda, aiming to gather more international support to implement renewable energy-related infrastructure investments, which would ultimately benefit the EU's RePowerEU and European Green Deal Agenda strategies. Within the framework of RSCT, the Eastern Mediterranean region has emerged as an important regional security complex shaped by competing energy interests and geopolitical rivalries. The establishment of the EMGF reflects the importance of energy cooperation, as it not only serves economic goals but also security and

geopolitical aspirations. The EMGF can be framed as a multilateral coalition of states that collectively seek to manage regional tensions and counterbalance the influence of Turkey, which is not part the forum. The EU's permanent observer status in the Forum, also shows its strategic alignment with the group and its indirect participation in regional bandwagoning aimed at curbing Turkey's regional assertiveness. Although the coalition does not serve as a mechanism against Russia, the EU's influence on the Forum could reshape regional energy alignments in a way that weakens both Russian and Turkish leverage over Eastern Mediterranean energy routes and resources. Moreover, the EU leverages its permanent observer status to advance its broader strategic goals, including diversifying natural gas sources in light of turning away from Russian imports, and promoting renewable energy transition aligned with its environmental agendas. Therefore, the EU's engagement in the EMGF is an example on how regional multilateral platforms can serve dual functions in energy diplomacy: on one hand they provide a platform for resource cooperation, and on the other hand they act as mechanisms of regional balancing within a security complex.

The EU-Egypt energy cooperation exemplifies the strategic alignment of energy diplomacy with broader geopolitical objectives in the context of EU-Russia competition. By investing in renewable infrastructure, and deepening natural gas trade, the EU is not only securing alternative energy sources but also reshaping regional energy governance in its favour. These efforts contribute to the EU's long-term goals of reducing dependency on Russian energy, while parallelly expanding its influence in the region. The EU's involvement in regional platforms such as the EMGF also underscores its role as an external actor embedded in a Regional Security Complex, leveraging multilateralism to counterbalance rival powers and secure its energy interests in a contested geopolitical space. As such, the EU's engagement in Egypt represents the fusion of energy transition objectives with geopolitics-driven foreign policy.

5.4. Comparison

In order to shed light on the geopolitical motivations and strategic objectives underlying the EU's and Russia's engagement in the Egyptian energy sector, the two powers' approaches need to be compared and assessed. This comparison provides us with an understanding of the differences in geopolitical engagement tools, and the motivations behind specific actions in the context of global energy competition. The following table summarizes the similarities and differences in the two actors' approach.

Element	Russia	EU
Strategic goal	*Gain influence in the region through engagement with Egypt, secure long-term stable energy markets*	
Broader goals	Secure alternative energy markets after losing the EU's market	Securing alternative energy import sources, while advancing global renewable transition
Broader geographic focus	Africa as a continent	Mediterranean neighbourhood
Approach	*Filling in technological gaps in the Egyptian energy sector*	
	Continuation of a historical strategy	
	Bilateral, market-oriented	Bilateral and multilateral, market orientation but with normative elements
Tools	Infrastructure investments	Infrastructure investments, technological, economic and regulatory harmonization
Areas of energy sector cooperation	*Strategic cooperation in the natural gas sector*	
	Nuclear energy	Solar, Wind, Green Hydrogen,
Broader areas of cooperation	Trade and Military	Trade and Migration

Table 1: Comparison of the geopolitical approaches of the EU and Russia in Egypt's energy sector

When comparing Russia and the EU, there are several similarities that we can note. Firstly, both the EU's and Russia's approach can be understood as a continuation of a historical approach to the relations with Egypt. Russia's closer engagement with Egypt originates from the 1950s, from a time when Cairo loosened its ties with Western powers, given their reluctance to help Egypt in strategic investments, such as weaponry and hard infrastructure in the Ashwan High Dam. The EU's approach originates from the 1970s, namely the Global Mediterranean Policy and the Barcelona Process. Within these agreements the outline of the current EU approach is visible, which is to support already existing national initiatives that align with EU priorities, and to include normative elements in the agreements, aiming to harmonize the region both economically and politically. This approach also helps avoid tensions related to sovereignty, as the partner country receives support in its own initiatives, which enhances project ownership and better relations with the EU. This ongoing pattern of engagement shows each actor's wider regional goals, as explained in RSCT, which sees Egypt as a key point within overlapping security networks.

Secondly, both actors adopted a similar strategy of filling in technological gaps in the Egyptian energy sector, which results in an asymmetrical relationship between Egypt and the investing country. This aspect might seem redundant, however, many development initiatives fail because they simply replicate the investing country's policies without local needs. However, when the investments address these needs, filling in financial or technological gaps in the country, they are more successful in creating influence and dependency (Givewell, 2010). We can see that both Russia and the EU have recognized this, as they both offer solutions for crucial elements of the Egyptian energy sector. However, Russia is providing technical and financial help for the nuclear program, while the EU focuses on renewable energy-related investments.

The EU's strong engagement in the renewable energy sector also reflects a broader competition between the two powers. While Russia has been a global leader in fossil fuels, such as natural gas, with the growing relevance of renewables, it is slowly losing relevance in global energy markets. On the other side, the EU is emerging as a leader in renewable energy technologies, such as green hydrogen, aiming to take a leading position in global energy markets. This difference in energy focus aligns with the broader energy transformations outlined in ETT, which provides a useful lens to understand the EU-Russia geopolitical competition on the global scale. ETT explains how shifts from carbon-intensive to low-carbon energy systems are reshaping global power structures, creating new centers of influence, and decreasing the dominance of traditional fossil fuel exporters. Russia is a major actor in global fossil fuel markets, especially in the natrual gas sector. Due to the EU's turn from Russian gas imports, as well as the global shift towards renewable energy, Russia's role in global energy markets is threatened. Its focus on nuclear energy in Egypt reflects a desire to maintain relevance by exporting technology-intensive energy solutions where Moscow has competitive advantage given its vast nuclear fuel resources. At the same time, the EU's strong emphasis on renewable energy projects such as solar, wind, and green hydrogen in Egypt reflects its broader ambition to lead the global energy transition. By supporting sustainable energy solutions and aligning them with international climate commitments, the EU is positioning itself as a leader in the emerging renewable energy markets. Brussel's strategy seeks to secure strategic influence in neighboring regions through renewable energy cooperation, which also creates an alternative market for the EU after turning away from Russian energy imports. Through the theoretical understanding of ETT, Egypt is a key area of energy transition geopolitics, where traditional and emerging energy powers are competing in the market for different visions of energy development.

Lastly, both the EU's and Russia's strategic objective is to gain influence in the regions intersecting Egypt (Eastern Mediterranean, North African and Middle Eastern regions), while securing long-term

energy markets, however, with significant differences in their approaches. Russia's broader strategy focuses on Africa, aiming to gain influence across the continent through state-led nuclear energy engagements. This approach aims to secure stable energy markets for Russian exports, in the context of the EU's turn from Russian energy markets. By strengthening ties with Egypt and offering to fill the technological gaps in their nuclear energy program, Russia has secured a long-term energy partner, as they will provide the new NPP with nuclear fuel for the lifecycle of the plant, as well as technical assistance in the first 10 years of the operation of the plant. It is also important to differentiate between other large-scale infrastructure projects and the El Dabaa NPP, as nuclear energy requires a more specific technology and resources, which results in a bigger dependency on Russia. This suggests a possible political dependency, as Russia will be able to influence Egypt's decision making in regional matters in the future, using the nuclear program as pressure tool on the Egyptian leadership. On the opposite, the EU's approach is multi-faceted, involving both bilateral and multilateral engagements that combine infrastructure investments with technological, economic, and regulatory harmonization with European markets. The EU's broader geographic focus is the Mediterranean neighborhood, reflecting its strategic interest in maintaining stability close to its borders.

From the perspective of Regional Security Complex Theory, Egypt is understood as an overlay region, where several regional securities intersect, namely, the Eastern Mediterran, North African and Middle Eastern security complexes. As an overlay region, Egypt offers an ideal ground for the geopolitical competition, as it can be seen as a gateway into influencing all the mentioned regions. In the context of the Egyptian energy sector, we can see that energy is a regional matter, given the interconnected nature of energy infrastructure and trading relations. As an example, both Libya and Jordan heavily depend on Egyptian energy imports (OEC, 2023), therefore, if Egypt fails to produce enough energy for exports, this will have an effect for the broader geographical area. Because Egypt is so connected to different regions, gaining influence over its energy sector affects several security networks at once, making the EU's and Russia's involvement more strategic.

In this same context, both the EU and Russia are understood as penetrating powers, seeking to shape regional dynamics by intervening in strategic sectors such as energy, in pursuit of their broader geopolitical interests. The EU's penetration to the region has several underlying motivations. Firstly, given the geographical closeness of Egypt, and the experiences of the 2015 migration crisis, the EU aims to create stability in its neighbourhood, avoiding pressure on its borders caused by mass migration. To achieve this goal, it is in the EU's best interest to aid energy security efforts in neighbouring countries, as energy is a critical element of stability. Secondly, given

the EU's turn from Russian energy imports, Brussels aims to secure alternative energy markets. A key part of this strategy is supporting renewable energy development, as it aligns with the EU's interests to help establish new energy import regions. By providing early assistance, the EU can foster asymmetrical partnerships that lead to more competitive pricing and more stable relations with Egypt. On the other hand, Russia's involvement in the region through Egypt can be explained by its goal to secure long-term export markets for its nuclear technology and resources. This strategy may also include elements of a potential debt-trap, where infrastructure-based influence could provide Russia broader political influence.

In sum, Egypt's role as a regional energy hub places it at the center of a wider geopolitical competition between penetrating powers, each leveraging energy diplomacy to gain influence across overlapping security complexes. While both powers act with similar motivations of securing energy markets and gain regional influence through their involvement in the Egyptian energy sector, their strategies and geopolitical tools show key differences. Through understanding the details of their respective geopolitical strategies, we can better assess how the EU and Russia project power, and shape energy dependencies in the region. Moreover, this comparative analysis of EU and Russian engagement in Egypt's energy sector also highlights the broader geopolitical shifts taking place in the global energy order. With the EU promoting renewables, it ultimately seeks to position itself as a leader in the new global energy markets. By promoting new, technology-intensive energy sources such as green hydrogen, we can see how the EU aims to secure geopolitical influence through leadership in the emerging green energy sectors, attempting to shape the future energy order. To carry out both the EU's and Russia's strategies, Egypt has become a key area, where regional energy value chains overlaps, making it an overlapping area of multiple security complexes. The way Egypt manages its partnerships will also shape the broader power balance of the Eastern Mediterranean, North Africa, and the Middle East. Understanding the dynamics and tools in the EU-Russia competition in Egypt provides key insights into how energy and geopolitical strategy are increasingly intertwined in the 21st century.

6. Conclusion

The thesis aimed to investigate the underlying motivations and tools used for the geopolitical and strategic objectives of the EU and Russia in Egypt's energy sector. Throughout this study, both actors' strategy and approach was assessed in a Most Similar Comparative Analysis system. The thesis applied Regional Security Complex Theory as the main theoretical framework to understand the regional-level geopolitical tactics excercised by Russia and the EU in the Egyptian energy sector.

To provide a secondary, global lens to the thesis, Energy Transition Theory was applied to highlight how this case fits into a broader geopolitical competition between the EU and Russia, in the global energy scene. Their involvement in Egypt's energy sector was analyzed though the understandings provided by the theories, identifying Egypt as a strategic energy hub located in the intersection of overlapping security complexes. As a most-similar system, both the EU and Russia were identified as penetrating powers into Egypt's overlapping security complexes, namely, the Eastern Mediterranean, Africa and the Middle East. As RSCT states, Egypt's geostrategic location attracts external influence, and both the EU and Russia use energy diplomacy as a tool to gain regional influence. At the same time, through the lens of ETT, the EU and Russia embody two diverging paths in the global energy transformation. The EU aims to become a leader in the global green transition, positioning itself as a future energy leader globally. Meanwhile, Russia aims to counter the low-carbon system transition, aiming to maintain fossil fuel dominance with its oil, gas, and nuclear fuel reserves.

By presenting the historical roots of the approaches, we shed light on the aspect of continuation of foreign policy engagement with Egypt. Then, the broader energy policies, strategies and goals of Russia and the EU were analyzed, highlighting how the evolution of their relations also affect their foreign policy, especially in the energy sector. After, Russia's and the EU's respective individual involvement in the Egyptian energy sector was presented and analyzed, aiming to showcase the tools applied by both powers.Russia's strategy in Egypt is characterized by infrastructure-heavy, bilateral engagement points, such as the El-Dabaa nuclear power plant. The nuclear project establishes a long-term relationship between Egypt and Russia, as Moscow is contracted to provide nuclear fuel for the lifecycle of the plant, and it provides technical expertise and financial aid for the construction. This reflects Russia's approach, aiming to secure long-term export regions, and leveraging large-scale, high-dependence energy projects to secure long-term geopolitical influence. Russia's approach is also part of a broader foreign policy, aiming to redirect the loss of access to European markets following the Ukraine invasion to new export regions. In contrast, the EU's approach is rooted in regulatory frameworks, a mix of bilateral and multilateral cooperation, and support for renewable energy transitions. Through initiatives such as the RePowerEU initiative, the EU has invested in Egypt's energy market reform, which reflects the EU's broader strategy of exporting its energy transition model. It also fits into Brussels's goal to diversify its energy sources, moving away from fossil fuel dependencies from Russian oil and gas imports.

The findings point out that energy sector investments are a key geopolitical tool, which reflect broader regional and global motivations behind the EU's and Russia's engagement in the Egyptian

energy sector. Answering the thesis's research question, "*How are the EU's and Russia's geopolitical and strategic motivations reflected in their respective approaches to Egypt's energy sector?"* the specific country-case initiatives and engagement points were identified and connected to the powers' respective and global energy policy goals. The research presents that the EU aims to achieve its energy security and global renewable energy leadership goals through development projects, renewable energy investments, regulatory and normative harmonization. Meanwhile, Russia aims to achieve its objective of maintaining global energy sector relevance and securing long-term stable markets via large-scale, technology-intensive state-led projects, highlighting the El Dabaa NPP developed by ROSATOM in Egypt. While both actors engage with Egypt in a bilateral way, the EU's additional multilateral approach through the East Mediterranean Gas Forum underline Brussels's focus on regional integration. This is further strengthened by the EU's regulatory harmonization efforts, which also enhances regional integration to the EU's markets. All in all, the research demonstrates how energy diplomacy serves as a tool for broader geopolitical motivations, with each actor employing different methods to gain influence in host countries in ways that align with their broader regional and global strategies.

The thesis contributes to the academic world by providing an understanding of energy geopolitics, connecting national-level cases to broader regional and global geopolitical dimensions. By exploring the relatively understudied case of Egypt's energy sector, the thesis contributes to the broader discussion on energy geopolitics in Africa. Moreover, the thesis provides a different perspective for the global energy system transition discourses in the Academic world, by applying ETT to a country-level analysis. Lastly, the thesis also provides a less mainstream perspective to the discussions on the EU-Russia relations, by examining their indirect geopolitical competition, instead of their direct diplomatic relations.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that this is a broad topic, which requires further research to fully understand it in detail. My thesis shed light on the EU-Russia angle of the geopolitical tensions in Egypt and the East Mediterranean, however, the involvement of Turkey, China, the Gulf states and the US should also be considered in future research. Moreover, it is important to mention that Russia's nuclear energy engagements in Africa can also help promote renewable energy system transitions in the future, as nuclear energy can provide a gateway into green energy, by providing a low-carbon, stable energy production to cover the transition period. This aspect could also become a topic to study in the future, balancing the current research's stance on Russia's nuclear projects in Africa.

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