

# Pipeline Politics and Cash in the Pipeline

*An analysis of Russian official rhetoric on the Nord Stream 2 and  
Power of Siberia gas pipelines*



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**Sander Vellekoop**

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Leiden University

Supervisor: Dr. M. Bader, Institute for History

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## Abstract

Especially in the last decade, pipelines transporting Russian natural gas abroad have come under much attention in academic studies. The academic debate surrounding these pipelines is characterized by a wide variety of different viewpoints, which can be broadly classified into studies ascribing geopolitical and economic motives to Russian energy policymakers. This thesis adds to the literature on Russian gas pipelines by examining Russian official rhetoric on the Nord Stream 2 and Power of Siberia pipelines, the largest pipelines from Russia to Europe and China, respectively, planned in the last decade. In particular, it questions the dichotomy between geopolitical and economic ways of looking at pipelines by examining how Russian officials use narratives of both kinds in justifying the construction of these pipelines. In analyzing statements from various Russian officials, this thesis used qualitative content analysis, meaning that the narratives discussed are the result of a close reading and interpretation of the statements, instead of identifying and counting the use of key words. The results of this research show that Russian officials have regularly made use of both geopolitical and economic narratives to justify both pipelines – with economic narratives slightly more prevalent – , but the nature of these narratives and the frequency of their use differs widely between the cases. This calls into question the strong focus on either economic or geopolitical factors that can be seen in the literature.

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## List of Abbreviations

<b>APEC</b>	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
<b>bcm</b>	Billion cubic meters (of natural gas)
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>CNPC</b>	China National Petroleum Company
<b>EIA</b>	Energy Information Administration
<b>IEA</b>	International Energy Agency
<b>IR</b>	International Relations (referring to the academic discipline)
<b>LNG</b>	Liquified Natural Gas
<b>MDRFE</b>	Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East and Arctic
<b>ME</b>	Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation
<b>MED</b>	Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation
<b>MFA</b>	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation
<b>OPEC</b>	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
<b>QCA</b>	Qualitative Content Analysis
<b>US</b>	United States of America

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# Introduction

The Russian Federation has the largest reserves of natural gas in the world, owning around 25% of the world's total proven reserves. According to the United States (US) Energy Information Administration (EIA), of the 212 billion cubic meters (bcm) Russia exported in 2016, 90% was delivered through gas pipelines. In total, gas exports constituted 13% of Russia's total export revenues in 2015 (EIA 2017). Given this importance of natural gas exports to both Russia and its customers – with the European Union (EU) importing 40% of its total natural gas supply from Russia in 2019 (Moravcsik 2019) – gas pipelines have been an important element in the study of Russia's foreign policy towards the EU in particular. Within this literature, there is a divide between approaches which primarily ascribe geopolitical considerations to Russia's construction of gas pipelines, being used to exert influence over gas importers and countries through which the pipelines run, and economic approaches, which focus on the importance of natural gas exports to the Russian economy (e.g. Casier 2011; Judge, Maltby, and Sharples 2016; Siddi 2017; 2018).

This thesis examines whether Russian official rhetoric on specific pipeline projects reflects this broad divide in the literature, making use of two case studies: Nord Stream 2 and the Power of Siberia. With an export capacity of 55 bcm and 38 bcm per year these pipelines are the largest Russian gas pipelines to their destinations (Europe and China, respectively) agreed to in the last decade (e.g. Vatansever 2017: 6). Nord Stream 2 is a pipeline project launched in 2015 by Russian state-controlled gas company Gazprom and a consortium of Western European energy companies. The pipeline is planned to have a capacity of 55 bcm per year and runs, parallel to the existing Nord Stream pipeline opened in 2011, from Russia to Germany via the Baltic Sea (e.g. Siddi 2020: 548-549). Opponents of this pipeline mainly argue that this capacity expansion on the offshore route from Russia to Germany through the Baltic would allow Russia to fully supply Germany – the largest consumer of its natural gas in Europe – while cutting off supplies to the countries through which the current pipelines run, including Poland and Ukraine. Countries like these, therefore, consider Nord Stream 2 to be undesirable from a geopolitical point of view (e.g. Selden 2020: 153). As of late April 2021, this pipeline was close to completion, despite sanctions from the US on

companies involved having slowed down construction (Elliott 2021). The Power of Siberia pipeline, a pipeline from the Russian Far East to China with an annual export capacity of 38 bcm,<sup>1</sup> was agreed to in 2014 by Gazprom and the China National Petroleum Company (CNPC). This first pipeline to China is considered as a major step for Moscow to diversify its natural gas exports away from the almost complete reliance on the European market (e.g. Røseth 2017: 25; Skalamera 2018: 346). The 3000-kilometer pipeline was launched in December 2019 (DW 2019a).

So far, there has been very little academic attention for Russian official rhetoric on gas pipelines, with studies focusing largely on one specific narrative, such as the narrative that the Nord Stream 2 pipeline is meant to diversify pipeline infrastructure away from the ‘unreliable’ Ukrainian pipeline system (e.g. Tichý 2019). The downside that comes with research like this is that analysis of just one specific narrative on one pipeline obscures other factors that can be used to justify the construction of a new pipeline. In other words, studies like these tend to focus on either geopolitical or economic narratives, thus continuing the scholarly divide between these two. This thesis aims to go beyond the division between geopolitically- and economically-informed scholarship on Russian natural gas policy, by including both geopolitical and economic narratives, thus creating a more comprehensive picture of Russian official rhetoric on these gas pipelines. Although statements from Russian government officials should, of course, not be taken to give a full picture of Russia’s actual policy, a comprehensive study like this, as already argued by Goldthau and Sitter (2020: 13), can give us an indication of the extent to which both types of reasoning inform a country’s energy policy. In order to identify the different geopolitical and economic framings, this research uses qualitative content analysis, examining statements from various Russian government officials, as well as from state gas company Gazprom.

This leads us to the main question of this thesis: “*How are the Nord Stream 2 and Power of Siberia pipelines represented in Russian official energy rhetoric in geopolitical and market terms?*”

In the following chapter, this thesis first provides a more in-depth overview of the literature on international energy relations in general, and Russia’s gas relations with

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1 The Far Eastern Federal District (“*Дальневосточный федеральный округ*”), roughly speaking, spans the federal subjects of Russia to the east of Lake Baikal (dfo.gov.ru N.D.).

Europe and China in particular, providing a more detailed image of the geopolitical-economic division that permeates through the literature on these topics. After briefly going into the chosen method of qualitative content analysis and the process of data selection, the thesis goes on to provide an overview of the geopolitical and economic framings Russian officials have used for both pipelines. This overview of the research results is followed by a discussion on these findings, and a more general conclusion.

Based on the qualitative content analysis of the data, this thesis argues that a variety of both geopolitical and economic framings on both pipelines, questioning the rigid divide between the approaches commonly found in the literature on Russian gas export pipelines. Furthermore, the differences in framings of both pipelines suggest that there might be no such thing as a single 'Russian' policy on gas pipelines, with Russian officials employing different types of narratives more or less frequently depending on the pipeline project.



# Literature Review

Before moving on to the analysis of Russian official rhetoric on the two pipelines in question, this literature review shows how the broad division in geopolitical and market-based framings of energy policy permeates throughout the literature. After going into the main schools of thought on international energy trade in general, and gas trade through pipelines in particular, this review focuses on literature on Russian natural gas export policy towards both Europe and China. As we shall see, on all of these levels, the literature can clearly be divided into these two broad approaches, which sets the stage for the continuation of this thesis.

## International Energy Relations and Trade in Gas

The academic study of governments' foreign policies towards energy resources – particularly the governance of demand and supply of oil and natural gas – first arose in the 1980s, as governments responded to the shocks in world oil markets brought about by export cuts from the OPEC cartel of leading oil producers (e.g. Gilpin 1987: 198; Kuzemko, Keating and Goldthau 2018: 3). Since then, the study of energy policy has been characterized by its rather fragmented nature, being a subject at the crossroads of many different disciplines, including economics, political science and international relations (e.g. Strange 1988: 190-191; Månsson et al. 2014: 2; Van de Graaf and Colgan 2016: 2).

Despite this disciplinary fragmentation, some scholars have ventured into theoretical analyses of international energy relations, drawing in particular from theoretical schools of thought from International Relations (IR) scholarship. Two broad theoretical accounts predominate in this regard, one with a focus on (geo-)political factors, and the other with a focus on more market-based factors (e.g. Dudau and Nedelcu 2016; Judge and Maltby 2017: 184; Wilson 2019: 115-6).

The 'geopolitical' approach to international energy relations has its basis in the Realist theoretical school of IR (Stoddard 2013: 444; Wilson 2019: 115). Broadly speaking, different variations of Realism in IR share a focus on states, which are assumed to be rational actors seeking to maximize their power and influence abroad (e.g. Česnakas

2010: 49). Energy resources, being ‘strategic commodities’ – of which every state must have a stable supply for their societies to function – are thus considered tools to exercise power in foreign policy for exporters, and sources of external vulnerability for importers (e.g. Luft and Korin 2009: 340; Goldthau and Sitter 2015: 30; Klare 2015). This connection between energy resources and a state’s power can be seen in the study of energy relations in the academic debate on the ‘energy weapon’, referring to the use of energy resources as a means of an energy-exporting country to exert power on its export partners (e.g. Smith Stegen 2011: 6505; Blackwill and Harris 2016: 86).

The ‘market-based’ approach, on the other hand, tends to emphasize the role of markets and international cooperation in international energy relations (Goldthau and Witte 2009: 390; Chester 2010: 891-892). In its most extreme form (e.g. Noël 2008), this approach holds that energy resources are traded like any other commodity, with political factors not being of importance. However, more generally, this approach holds that trade in energy resources benefits both energy exporting and importing countries, as (almost) no country possesses both all energy resources it needs as well as the technical and financial means to extract them (e.g. Goldthau and Witte 2009: 382; Belyi 2015: 20; Overland 2016). Therefore, this approach tends to focus on the need for cooperation between energy exporting and importing countries, which is argued to bring mutual benefits (e.g. Wilson 2017; Van de Graaf and Colgan 2016: 8; Van de Graaf et al. 2016: 12).

Naturally, these two broad approaches to the subject matter study international energy relations from radically different points of view. In order to overcome the divide between the two, an increasing amount of scholarship has called for more nuanced approaches. For instance, Hughes and Lipsy (2013) and Stoddard (2013) have called for study of the formation of energy policy on a domestic level, taking into account the way domestic institutions and norms shape energy policy. Similarly, Kuzemko (2014) and Wilson (2019) argue for the inclusion of ideas and narratives surrounding energy in specific national contexts. Based on this increasing call for scholarship on international energy trade to pay more attention to ideas about energy policy, Goldthau and Sitter (2020: 13) argue that it is essential to study how assumptions from both the geopolitical and market-liberal approaches inform energy policy-making in individual countries. Following these suggestions to add more nuance to the study of international energy policy, this research focuses on how elements of these two dominant framings

of international energy policy-making are reflected in Russian official statements on the two pipelines examined. However, before moving further, it is useful to briefly discuss the specificities of trade in natural gas via pipeline.

### Politics of Pipelines: The Specificity of International Gas Trade

While much of the aforementioned literature discusses energy resources in general terms, trade in natural gas is different from trade in other energy resources like oil, because of the importance of pipelines in this sector. This has been a basis for literature specifically on international energy trade via pipeline, which this section briefly discusses.

What sets natural gas apart from other energy resources like oil and coal are the high costs involved in its transportation. Unlike oil, which can be transported in various ways, natural gas is almost exclusively transported by pipelines, gas-specific infrastructure which usually has to cover thousands of kilometers (O'Sullivan 2013: 39; Belyi 2015: 41-43). Therefore, establishing and maintaining gas trade between countries by pipeline requires large infrastructural investments. This has led some scholars to describe pipelines as 'umbilical cords', making gas trade in a given region very dependent on (political) considerations of specific exporting and importing countries, as well as those of any transit country a pipeline passes through (e.g. Pascual and Zambetakis 2010: 20-21; Skalamera Groce 2020: 991). The concrete relationship created between specific producing and consuming countries has ensured that markets for gas are far more regionalized than markets for other resources, with different systems of trading and pricing natural gas existing in different parts of the world, largely as an outcome of political bargaining (e.g. Hulbert and Goldthau 2013: 111; Belyi 2015: 49). Piped gas tends to be traded under long-term (usually around 20-30 years) contracts negotiated between governments, which specify a minimum annual amount of gas the consumer country has to pay for, as well as fixed price formulas (e.g. Grigas 2017: 48-49; Boussena and Locatelli 2017: 551). In other words, because of the large investment needed to construct gas pipelines, trade in natural gas tends to be considered more informed by politically motivated decisions than other energy sources.

Because of the political factors involved in the decisions to construct pipelines, they are often considered in geopolitical terms. For instance, according to some scholars, pipelines can create a situation of dependence on one specific supplier (e.g. Balmaceda 2013: 30-31). This situation of dependence has been argued to provide the producing country with leverage over the importing country, for instance using threats of supply cuts (e.g. Krickovic 2015; Grigas 2017: 14). However, in literature with a more economic focus, pipelines have also been argued to create a situation of mutual dependence, as both exporting and importing countries rely on the regional market created by the pipeline built between them, either as a source of gas or a source of income. This would ensure potential for increased cooperation between them, as both of them have an interest in jointly maintaining a pipeline, in order to gain a return on their investment (e.g. Casier 2011: 496; Stulberg 2012: 809; Proedrou 2018a: 411). Furthermore, increasing supply of liquified natural gas (LNG) – gas cooled down to such an extent that it can be shipped by tanker in a liquid form – has arguably created a more global gas market, providing gas importers alternatives to piped gas and (potentially) diminishing the political and strategic importance of pipelines (e.g. Hulbert and Goldthau 2013).

Thus, according to the literature, trade in natural gas, primarily because of the importance of expensive pipeline infrastructure, has a strong (geo-)political dimension. Nevertheless, they can also be seen as creating a (regional) gas market, where specific importing and exporting countries depend on each other. Based on this debate, the following section looks at both more geopolitical and more market-based explanations of Russia's natural gas policy towards Europe offered in the literature.

### Russian Natural Gas Policy towards Europe

Having discussed the academic literature on trade in energy resources in general, and natural gas in particular, it is now time to move on to discussing the literature on Russia's natural gas policy, starting with its gas export policy towards European countries, the primary export destinations of Russian piped gas.

Russian natural gas exports – and those of the Soviet Union before (Högselius 2013) – have been inextricably linked with pipelines bringing gas from West Siberian extraction

locations to (Western) Europe. In 2019, Russian state gas company Gazprom, which holds a monopoly on gas exports by pipeline, transported 199 bcm of gas to EU countries – the vast majority of Russia’s total gas exports (Gazprom 2020: 57). This occurs through a sizeable network of pipelines, most of them running through several transit states in Eastern Europe. Like in the literature on international energy relations more broadly, both geopolitical and more economically-based approaches exist here, which explain Russia’s support for the construction of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline in different ways.

### *The Geopolitical Approach - Energy as a Weapon*

According to Romanova (2016: 860) and Siddi (2018: 1553), among others, the literature on Russia’s gas relations with its European consumers is dominated to a large extent by geopolitically-focused studies. These usually perceive Russia as a state trying to use its gas resources as a tool to attain non-energy related foreign policy goals. As this section shows, this can be seen both in the ideas that this strand of literature claims to underlie Russian gas policy towards Europe, as well as in the extensive academic discussions on Russia’s ‘energy weapon’ in Europe, including in the context of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.

This geopolitical approach starts from the assertion that the Russian state is largely in control of Russia’s oil and gas companies. For instance, Hadfield (2008: 232) argues that Russia’s energy policy has been highly state-centric during president Putin’s first and second terms, with almost all oil and gas companies forming part of a geopolitical strategy to gain leverage in foreign relations. The conclusion that state control over energy resources and their use in foreign policy are a defining feature of the energy policy of the Putin administration – up to this day – is also shared by Wilson (2015: 231), as well as İşeri and Özdemir (2017: 61). This idea of energy resources being the primary means for expanding Russian influence abroad is also seen in discourse of Putin’s Russia being an ‘energy superpower’ (e.g. Rutland 2008; Bouzarovski and Bassin 2011; Kuteleva 2020). According to this discourse, Russian oil and gas resources would allow the country to return to the ‘superpower’ status Moscow had lost upon the collapse of the USSR. As Kuteleva (2020: 88) argues, even as the relatively high prices for oil and gas in the 2000s made way for lower energy prices in the 2010s, Putin’s

regime continued to construct energy as the foundation of Russia's foreign policy power, leading Russian officials to claim a special status in its relations with the EU based on Russia's 'energy superpower' status.

Also when it comes to Russian natural gas exports towards Europe, Charokopos and Dagoumas (2018: 458) conclude that '*Moscow is inclined to emphasize and concentrate on the political gains from natural gas exports,*' a conclusion Kosowska and Kosowski (2016), as well as Vatansver (2017: 6) also make when it comes to the rationale of Gazprom and the Russian government to construct new natural gas pipelines towards Europe. According to this strand of literature, the primary means by which Russia would exert influence in Europe using natural gas is the so-called 'energy weapon'. The exact definition of this concept is debated. Some scholars (e.g. Smith Stegen 2011) argue that it is simply a process in which Russia uses the threat of shutoffs of natural gas supplies in order to coerce European countries into (not) taking a certain political decision. Others, on the other hand, argue that there are various instruments through which Russia can exert influence over the European importers of its gas (Newnham 2011; Orttung and Overland 2011). According to those adhering to the former approach to the 'energy weapon', including Mišík and Prachárová (2016: 595), as well as Mikulska (2020: 409), Russia has mostly used the 'energy weapon' to politically pressure countries which are (almost) entirely dependent on Russian natural gas for their gas supply, such as Ukraine. An example of this would be the 2006 and 2009 'gas crises', when Russia temporary cut off gas supplies to Ukraine at times of political tension between Moscow and Kyiv (Umbach 2010: 1230; Lee and Connolly 2016: 106). However, according to Newnham (2011: 142), as well as Orttung and Overland (2011: 84), the 'energy weapon' should be seen more broadly, with Russia using a combination of 'carrots' (such as subsidized energy) for friendly countries and 'sticks' (such as temporary gas cutoffs) for more unfriendly ones. Wigell and Vihma (2016: 615) argue that this broadened 'energy weapon' reveals a picture of Russian energy influence far beyond Ukraine, with more Russia-sympathetic countries like Germany getting their gas at more favorable conditions than less friendly ones like Poland. However, what both approaches to the 'energy weapon' have in common is the belief that Russia considers its gas resources primarily as a means of exerting influence over countries which import its piped gas.

This conception of gas as a Russian ‘weapon’ is also reflected in the rationales for the construction of the Nord Stream II pipeline that this strand of literature ascribes to Russian energy policy-makers. According to those scholars who emphasize the geopolitical implications of this pipeline, the most frequently cited reason for Gazprom and the Russian government to be interested in this pipeline is a desire to drastically reduce dependence on pipelines which run to the EU through Ukraine (e.g. Kosowska and Kosowski 2016: 760; Vatansever 2017: 8; Charokopos and Dagoumas 2018: 455; Siddi 2020: 549). Some of these scholars consider the attempt to remove Ukraine’s strategic role as a transit country in light of a Russian desire to strengthen its ‘energy weapon’ towards Ukraine, including a possibility of coercing Kyiv to resolve the crisis in Eastern Ukraine on terms favorable to Moscow (e.g. Vihma and Wigell 2016: 383; Siddi 2017: 380). This also points us to a possible representation of Nord Stream 2 by the Russian government, because, as argued by Tichý (2019: 190), as well as De Jong et al. (2020: 1), Gazprom and Russian government officials tend to represent Ukraine as an unreliable transit country, stressing the need for ‘diversification’ of transit routes. As such, according to these scholars, the primary rationale for Nord Stream 2 would be a desire to circumvent Ukraine as a transit country, as it would be an unstable partner which poses a threat to gas supplies from Russia to the EU.

As this section has shown, according to this strand of the literature, Russian gas policy towards Europe is based on using natural gas exports and pipelines as a means to exert leverage over importers of its gas. Arguably, Russia considers itself an ‘energy superpower’, uses (threats of) gas supply shutoffs as a ‘weapon’ against its importers. As such, according to this body of literature, Nord Stream 2 is meant primarily to increase Russia’s power, for instance over Ukraine.

### *Market-based approaches – Gazprom under Pressure*

The geopolitical approach to Russian gas policy towards European gas importing countries is criticized by scholars who argue that market considerations like profitability also play a part in Russian decision-making. As shown below, changing conditions on the EU natural gas market over the last decade have led to a proliferation of studies arguing the Russian government and Gazprom increasingly take market

conditions into account, including when it comes to the construction of new gas pipelines like Nord Stream 2.

Among scholars criticizing the explanation of Russian gas policy in geopolitical terms, the more geopolitical framing of Russian energy policy as largely considered too simplistic. For instance, Judge, Maltby, and Sharples (2016), argue that most of the literature on Russian energy policy towards Europe is characterized by ‘geopolitical reductionisms’. One of these ‘reductionisms’, as Casier (2011; 2016) argues, is that much of the geopolitically focused literature ignores the Russian government’s strong dependence on natural gas exports to Europe for the state budget (Casier 2016: 770). This type of ‘reductionism’ is also questioned by Aalto et al. (2014), who argue that Gazprom and the Russian government are driven first and foremost by securing demand for Russian gas as profitably as possible. Another type of ‘reductionism’ criticized by Judge, Maltby, and Sharples (2016: 755) is the assumption that Russian energy policy is based on one set of ‘Russian’ interests. This type of ‘reductionism’ is also questioned by Romanova (2016), who argues that, although Russian energy policy is also informed by a geopolitical paradigm, certain Russian ministries tend to advocate more market-based approaches in energy relations with the EU (Romanova 2016: 872). What these different criticisms of the geopolitical approach to Russian gas policy have in common is that they point to economic considerations that they believe also play a significant role in Russian decision-making on gas policy towards Europe.

In recent years, this idea has become more prominent in literature on Russo-European gas relations, as a sizable body of literature argues that increasing competition on the EU market for natural gas has forced Russia into a more market-centered approach to gas relations with Europe. Around 2010, as economic crisis in the EU led to lower demand for natural gas, a large amount of new LNG supply – gas cooled down to such an extent that it can be shipped by tanker in a liquid form – started coming to the EU, mostly from newly-developed gas fields in the US. This discrepancy between supply and demand led to lower prices for LNG in Europe, which also put pressure on Gazprom to lower its prices for piped gas (Abdelal et al. 2014: 10-11; Hulbert and Goldthau 2013: 101; Loe 2019: 1124). As Boussena and Locatelli (2017) point out, this new environment provided Gazprom with a choice on the European market: stick to traditional gas trade based on long-term contracts with volumes and prices set by political bargaining, or use its large extraction and pipeline capacity to offer lower



prices and out-compete LNG suppliers. According to Locatelli (2015: 327) and Loe (2019: 1136), Gazprom has slowly moved towards the latter strategy, and has made its gas contracts increasingly flexible. As a result, as Abbas and Locatelli (2020: 436) show, Gazprom has managed to increase its market share on the EU market from 39% in 2014 to 41% in 2017. This response can be seen as a shift in priorities of Gazprom and Russian energy policymakers towards emphasis on a continued presence on the European gas market over its traditional methods based on political bargaining (Proedrou 2018b: 83).

Similarly, Kropatcheva (2014: 7-8), Stulberg (2015: 124), and Van de Graaf and Colgan (2017: 62) argue that competition on the European market has also forced Russia to be more concerned with its image as a reliable supplier, thus significantly weakening the 'energy weapon'. Stulberg (2015: 125) and Siddi (2018: 1568) even argue that this is why Moscow has not cut off supplies through Ukraine during the ongoing conflict there. In other words, according to these scholars, in the face of increasing competition on the European gas market from LNG supplies, Russia's gas policy towards Europe has become more based on market factors like maintaining market share.

This changing position of Russia in the EU gas market has also led to an alternative explanation of the rationale behind Nord Stream 2 for Gazprom and the Russian government. According to studies which have identified a more market-based rationale for this pipeline's construction, the pipeline offers Gazprom the opportunity to maintain or expand its market share in the EU by allowing larger volumes of Russian gas to be exported straight to Germany (e.g. Goldthau 2016: 19; Lang and Westphal 2017: 11; Abbas and Locatelli 2020: 438). Furthermore, according to Hecking and Weiser (2017: 23), as well as Eser et al. (2019: 829), increased supply of Russian gas through Nord Stream 2 could be a relatively cheap means to satisfy EU gas demand. This demand is predicted to grow in the coming decades because of declining production of natural gas in European countries like the Netherlands and because of policies aimed at phasing out more polluting sources of energy like coal (e.g. Goldthau 2016: 17). As Kuteleva (2020: 86) argues, the Putin administration has frequently tried to emphasize Russia's ability to satisfy the EU's gas demand by representing Russia-EU gas trade as an economic win-win situation. Based on the literature that points to a more market-based rationale behind Nord Stream 2, a similar framing might be expected in this case.

In short, especially since the EU market for natural gas became increasingly competitive, studies have paid increasing attention to economic considerations in Russian gas policy towards Europe. This literature, in addition to previous studies that have also criticized the ‘geopolitical reductionism’ in studies on Russian gas pipelines, thus questions some of the assumptions of the more geopolitically-focused research, including when it comes to the rationale behind the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. According to this strand of literature, Nord Stream 2 can also be seen as a sensible business project from a Russian perspective, with maintaining Gazprom’s market share on the EU market being the primary concern.

### Russian Gas Policy ‘Pivots’ to China

Having discussed Russia’s natural gas policy in the ‘Western’ direction – that is, towards Europe – this review now moves on to discuss Russia’s gas pipeline policy when it comes to the ‘Eastern’ direction – that is, to China. This chapter finds that, much like with Russia’s gas policy towards Europe, Russian gas policy in this direction is also described along mostly geopolitical and more market-based lines.

Since the 2012 Russian hosting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Vladivostok, the Putin administration has pursued a ‘Pivot to the East’, a broad policy of rapprochement with several countries in the Asia-Pacific region, aimed, according to some scholars, primarily towards capitalizing on this region’s rapid economic growth, including by acting as a provider of energy resources for the relatively resource-poor Asian countries (e.g. Kuchins 2014: 130-131; Rozman 2018: 15; Shagina 2020: 448). As Vassiliouk (2018: 181) points out, in the Russian Energy Strategy up to 2035, the Russian government expresses the desire for 31% of total Russian gas exports to go to the Asia-Pacific by that year, up from 16% in 2016. Other scholars, however, see Russia’s ‘Pivot to the East’ as driven more by the broader geopolitical aim of countering the hegemony of the US on the world stage together with China, an objective that has arguably become more important as Russia’s relations with the US and other Western countries deteriorated after the Ukraine crisis (e.g. Cox 2016: 329-330; Lukin 2016: 579; Charap et al. 2017: 36). This Russian rapprochement with Asian countries in the field of energy has also led to the first natural gas pipeline being constructed in this direction, in the form of the Power of Siberia pipeline.

### *Geopolitical Approach: An Anti-Western Pipeline*

Much like in the literature on Russia's energy relations with the EU, there has been a significant amount of research considering Russia's energy 'Pivot to the in geopolitical terms (e.g. Skalamera 2018: 60). However, rather than an attempt to gain influence in China through energy relations, this literature largely considers the 'energy pivot' as a response to deteriorating relations with the West.

Scholars who make this argument tend to point to the timing of the agreement between Russia and China: the contract for construction of the Power of Siberia pipeline was reached in May 2014, two months after Russia annexed Crimea. Researchers like Klein and Westphal (2016: 4), Rozman (2018: 13-14), as well as Liu and Xu (2021: 7) argue that the reaching of this agreement after 10 years of negotiations should primarily be seen as a Russian response to the increased international isolation in geopolitical and economic terms, as the annexation of Crimea had led to deteriorating economic relations with Western countries. This idea is confirmed by research that has examined the terms of the gas deal, as far as these have been disclosed. For instance, Sharples (2016: 898), Baev (2019: 7), and Shagina (2020: 454) have pointed out that the conditions of the agreement were rather more favorable to China than to Russia: gas prices were lower than the average price paid by EU countries, and the commercial risks of the development of two new gas fields and the construction of the 4000-kilometer-long pipeline were largely borne by Gazprom. As such, Charap et al. (2017: 25), Røseth (2017: 27), as well as Yilmaz and Daksueva (2019: 87) conclude, the gas deal should also be seen as an example of Russia's increasingly asymmetrical relationship with China, with Moscow having few other political and economic partners left since the annexation of Crimea.

Aside from the argument that Russia only agreed to the construction of the pipeline out of weakness, another explanation why Russia would agree on this deal with China on rather unfavorable terms is offered by Skalamera (2018: 69-70; see also Skalamera Groce 2020: 1001-1002), who argues that the agreement on construction of the Power of Siberia pipeline to China is a central part of Russia's increasingly anti-Western foreign policy post-Crimea. This idea is in line with the argument that the Power of Siberia pipeline serves the Russian geopolitical goal of reducing economic dependence

on exports of natural gas to the EU by adding another direction of gas exports (e.g. Romanova 2016: 866; Boussena and Locatelli 2017: 560; An et al. 2020: 138), even though the pipelines delivering gas to Europe are not connected to the Power of Siberia pipeline (yet) (Sharples 2016: 904). As such, based on this strand of the literature, we might expect Russian geopolitical narratives surrounding the Power of Siberia pipeline to be focused on the importance of reducing dependence on gas exports to the EU, tying in with the increasingly anti-Western rhetoric from the Russian government since the 2014 annexation of Crimea.

### *Market Perspective: Developing the Far East*

However, this strong link suggested between Russia's energy policy towards Asia and its deteriorating relations with the West have also been criticized, primarily by scholars who argue that Russia's 'Pivot to the East' started before 2014. According to this strand of literature, Russia's 'Pivot', including in energy matters, is largely driven by two interrelated economic objectives: developing the Far Eastern regions of Russia and, in doing so, also building up closer economic ties with the growing countries of the Asia-Pacific, not just China (e.g. Locatelli et al. 2017: 160; Xu and Reisinger 2019: 2; Shagina 2020: 448).

According to several scholars arguing for this more economic understanding, Russia's 'Pivot to the East' post-Crimea should be seen in the context of the already previously declared desire to increase the role of Russia in the economically growing Asia-Pacific region by increasing economic activity in the vast – but also highly underdeveloped and depopulated – Far Eastern Federal District of Russia, which should act as a 'springboard' to this part of the world (e.g. Mankoff 2015: 72-73; Blakkisrud 2018: 14-15). For example, Blakkisrud (2018: 16) points out that the institutional framework for this element of Russia's 'Pivot' was already created in 2012, with the establishment of the partially decentralized Ministry for the Development of the Far East. An example of a project developed by the Russian government in order to both economically develop the Russian Far East as well as increase trade with Asia-Pacific countries is the Eastern Gas Program, jointly implemented by the Russian government and Gazprom since 2008. This plan aimed to create a network of gas extraction, transportation and processing in the Russian Far East, in order to give this region an economic boost, as

well as potentially to start up pipeline gas exports to China (e.g. Locatelli et al. 2017: 160; Vassiliouk 2018: 184; Demina 2020: 76). As pointed out by Kapitonov et al. (2018: 340-341), as well as Vassiliouk (2018: 176) and Demina (2020: 79), the Russian government's development of the 'Power of Siberia' pipeline, connecting a newly developed gas field in the Sakha Republic to the Chinese border, is a central project within this program. However, the effectiveness of energy trade with China for economic development in the Far East is called into question by Xu and Reisinger (2019: 5), who argue that Russian-Chinese energy diplomacy has largely been driven by interpersonal interactions on the highest government levels, meaning that dividends of this energy trade will largely flow to Moscow. Nonetheless, the aforementioned literature points us to another potential rationale behind the 'Power of Siberia' pipeline: aside from economic gains from exporting gas to China, economic development by establishing a gas industry in the underdeveloped regions of eastern Russia might be an objective present in Russian government rhetoric.

# Methodology

Before moving on to the analysis of the Russian government's representation of the Nord Stream 2 and Power of Siberia pipelines, this chapter goes into the methodology of Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) that this research employs, as well as justifying the primary sources this research uses to characterize Russian official rhetoric on the pipelines.

## *Methodological Framework: Qualitative Content Analysis*

According to Julien (2008: 120-121), QCA is a research process of categorizing textual data into clusters of similar categories – also known as coding – in order to identify patterns both within and among these themes. Contrary to quantitative approaches to content analysis, qualitative content analysis is less focused on the frequency with which a certain word or phrase is mentioned, and more on a close reading and interpretation of textual data, mindful that any text is open to subjective interpretation, as well as multiple meanings based on context. This makes a qualitative approach more suitable for this research, as this thesis is not only focused on what kinds of geopolitical or economic narratives are used in Russian official rhetoric, but more on *how* they come to the fore in this rhetoric.

Following Hsieh and Shannon's (2005: 1281) categorization of different approaches to QCA, this research takes a Directed Content Analysis approach, meaning that it draws its main coding categories from existing research. It takes geopolitical and economic framings of the pipelines as the two basic coding categories in both of its case studies. As we have seen, these are the two primary points of view from which Russian foreign energy policy has been conceptualized in the literature. A similar approach to QCA is taken by Lichtenstein et al. (2019), who base their analysis of coverage of the Ukraine crisis on Russian and German television on different theoretical approaches towards reporting on conflict.

By categorizing Russian official statements on the pipelines starting from these two categories, the research strives to identify narratives fitting in both categories. Naturally, as Hsieh and Shannon (2005: 1283) point out, this approach of taking theoretically determined categories as a basis for analysis runs a risk of confirmation

bias in the data research. However, considering these two frameworks have a solid foundation in the literature, and are also sufficiently broad to contain a variety of different framings within themselves, the risk of confirmation bias significantly affecting this research is more limited in this case.

Based on the two primary coding categories, the following chapters identify and discuss narratives in both categories, which are identified using the data itself. This type of data-driven (sub-)categorization is, according to Schreier (2012: 115-116), central to coding in QCA. This subcategorization occurs according to thematic criteria, that is, by identifying different narratives that fall under geopolitical or economic framing of the pipeline. As both the geopolitical and economic contexts of the two pipelines are different, as we have seen in the literature review, different sub-categories of the two central categories are established for the Nord Stream 2 and Power of Siberia pipelines.

Furthermore, according to Schreier (2012: 166), another central concept in QCA is that of reliability, meaning the extent to which the total ‘coding frame’ (that is, the various sub-categories identified based on the data) actually represents the data analyzed in a consistent way. In order to ascertain the reliability of the sub-categories identified, this research uses a comparison across time (Schreier 2012: 167), with the data on each pipeline from different sources analyzed at different times, with an interval of at least one week. The combination of the coding of statements from different sources is the basis for the categories identified in the following 2 chapters.

### *Data: Russian Official Rhetoric*

This section briefly goes into the sources of the data that is used in the following chapters to represent ‘Russian official rhetoric’ on the pipeline projects. As argued by Romanova (2016: 860-861), Russian foreign policy is rather centralized around the president, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) directly accountable to him. Furthermore, although she argues their competences in foreign energy policy are sometimes unclear, she points out that the Ministry of Energy (ME), and the Ministry of Economic Development (MED) tend to have some responsibility in working out the details of specific energy-related projects, under the overall coordination of the president and the MFA. Following Romanova (2016), this research includes statements from president Putin (all of the data examined in this research dates from after his 2012

return to the presidency), as well as statements coming from these three ministries on both pipelines as representative of ‘Russian official rhetoric’. Furthermore, when it comes to the ‘Power of Siberia’ pipeline, this research includes statements from the Ministry of the Development of the Russian Far East and Arctic (MDRFE), a ministry founded in 2012 with an aim to foster economic growth by attracting investment and overseeing the implementation of federal (infrastructural) projects in these regions (e.g. Blakkisrud 2018: 18; Xu and Reisinger 2019: 7).

In addition to these government institutions which are to various degrees involved in decision-making on these two international pipeline projects, this research also takes statements from Gazprom into consideration. Although this company is not officially an institution of the Russian state, the state does own a majority share in the company, and it does play a large role in Russia’s gas policy, selling gas at subsidized prices at home and having a monopoly on gas exports. This central position in Russia’s gas exports also gives the company a degree of political relevance – as opposed to solely economic – when studying Russia’s gas policy (e.g. Bilgin 2011; Mikulska 2020).

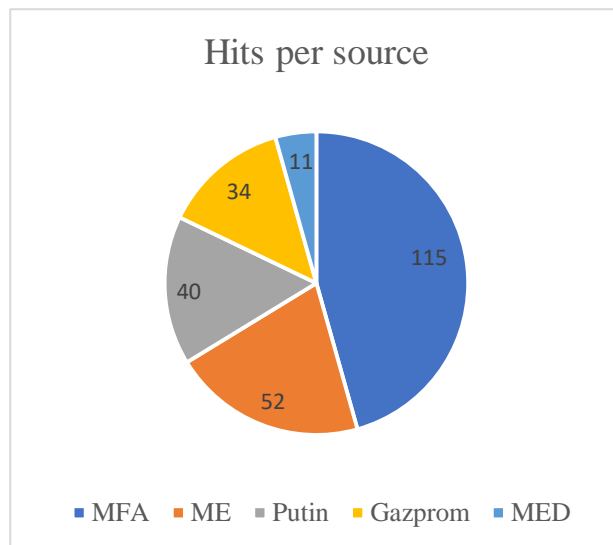
This leaves us with a large number of sources from which the qualitative data used in this research is drawn. Although, naturally, these different actors and institutions do not have the same amount of influence on decisions surrounding these pipelines, the continuation of this thesis focuses on narratives that can be identified across this wide range of different actors in Russian energy policy-making.



## The Nord Stream 2 Pipeline

This chapter presents the results of the qualitative content analysis of Russian government officials' framings of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. In correspondence with the more geopolitically- and more economically-oriented perspectives seen in the literature, this chapter (like the next) broadly divides these framings into a 'geopolitical' and an 'economic' category.

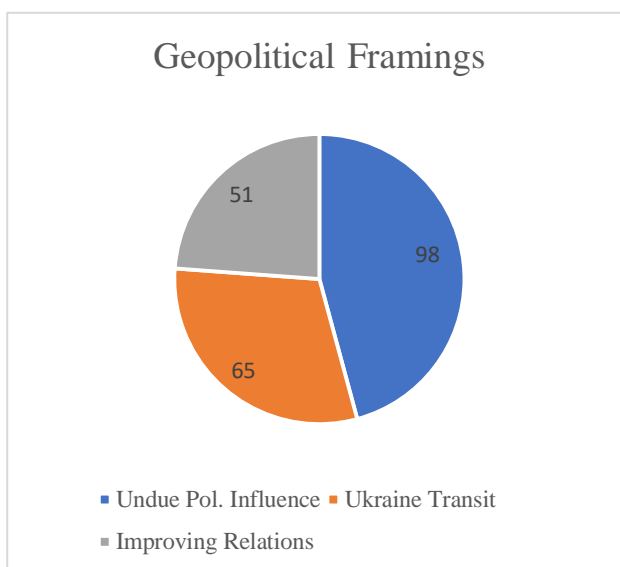
In total, 251 statements and documents were identified on the webpages of the relevant Russian institutions, starting from early 2015 – when the agreement to construct Nord Stream 2 was reached by Gazprom and its Western European partners – until the end of 2020. Of these, the highest number came from the website of the MFA, followed by the ME, statements of president Putin, official statements from Gazprom, and with the smallest number coming from the MED.



Based on the QCA method described in the methodology section, different geopolitical and economic framings of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline are formulated based on analysis of statements from these sources in this timeframe, which qualify the Nord Stream 2 pipeline in a certain way. An overview of the statements cited can be found in Appendix 1. All framings that were identified in less than 10% of the sources analyzed (that is, mentioned on fewer than 25 different occasions) were removed. This led to a total of 3 geopolitical framings and 4 economic ones. The continuation of this chapter discusses these 7 framings one by one, using direct quotes from the source material.

## Geopolitical Framings

Research of the source material has identified three broad geopolitical narratives on the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. The first of these is labeled ‘Undue Political Influence’, meaning that Nord Stream 2 is argued to have been subjected to undue politicization, both from within the EU and from the US, which put sanctions on all companies involved with the Nord Stream 2 project. The second is labeled ‘Risks of Ukrainian Transit’, meaning that government officials frequently point to a need to diversify away from reliance the Ukrainian gas transit network, as it poses a (geopolitical) risk to these supplies. The third is labeled ‘Improving Relations’, meaning that Nord Stream 2 provides a rare example of good neighborly relations between Russia and EU countries, in a time when these relations are broadly poor.



### *Undue Political Influence*

The geopolitical framing of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline used most frequently by the Russian government relates to the opposition towards the pipeline, which came – among others – from the US, which imposed sanctions on companies involved in the Nord Stream 2 project in 2018 (e.g. DW 2019b). According to this framing, this opposition to the pipeline would constitute undue politicization of a project agreed between Russian and European corporations.

Firstly, and especially in the first years after the announcement of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, Russian officials primarily accused the EU of political interference with the project. For instance, in early 2016, Foreign Minister Lavrov claimed that: “[То, что] [в ЕС] призывают не сотрудничать с Россией, потому что это будет во вред

Украине, [...] является попыткой затруднить, осложнить наши отношения извне, со стороны, вызывая к некоей атлантической евросоюзовской «солидарности»” (January 26, 2016). Not much later, in an interview with an Austrian newspaper in 2016, Energy Minister Novak claimed that: “со стороны Евросоюза политические мотивы превалируют над экономическими соображениями при организации поставок нефти и газа” (February 24, 2016). Elaborating further on the nature of these ‘political motives’ in the case of Nord Stream 2, Novak discussed the argument made by several EU countries that continued gas transit through Ukraine should be guaranteed, and concluded: “попытки указывать бизнесу и потребителям, какой маршрут является предпочтительным, а какие трубопроводы вообще не стоит строить, являются ничем иным, как откровенным политическим вмешательством в экономику” (February 24, 2016). Aside from discussing the EU’s insistence on continued transit through Ukraine, Lavrov (February 16, 2018) and Novak (February 26, 2019) also claim that the argument that the EU should diminish its dependence on Russian natural gas – rather than constructing Nord Stream 2 – is evidence of unnecessary politicization of trade in energy resources.

However, as the US introduced sanctions on the project in 2018, the accusations of undue political interference started to be aimed primarily at Washington. As Lavrov stated in early 2018: “США переходят к нечестной конкуренции, политическому давлению, чтобы заставить европейские страны строить соответствующие объекты и получать более дорогой газ”<sup>2</sup> (January 15, 2018). This frame became more prevalent after Russia and Ukraine reached an agreement on continued transit of gas through Ukraine in December 2019. According to Putin, the fact that US sanctions remained after this moment showed the true reason for the US opposition to the pipeline: “А если санкции останутся, остаётся только один побудительный мотив. Какой? Обеспечить конкурентные преимущества для своего LNG, для своего сжиженного газа” (March 11, 2020). Officials, at times, also use this cynical reading of the US intentions with sanctions on Nord Stream 2 to draw conclusions on the intentions of the US on the world stage more broadly. Lavrov, for instance, argued that: “после того, как США лишней раз продемонстрировали, что их дипломатия сводится прежде всего к устрашению разными методами – санкциями, ультиматумами, угрозами, когда наказывают ближайших сотрудников за то, что

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<sup>2</sup> США (Соединённые Штаты Америки) – US.

они решают свои экономические проблемы, задачи своей энергетической безопасности, думаю, ни одна страна в мире уже не должна сомневаться, что, если ей США что-то обещают, то бросят ее в любой момент” (December 23, 2019). In other words, Lavrov claims that the US has shown its unreliability on the world stage by ‘punishing’ its own allies for ‘solving their economic problems’.

In other words, the ‘undue political influence’ framing consists primarily of complaints from the Russian government on the attitude from some Western countries towards the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which the Russian side portrays as being unnecessary politicization of a project executed by corporations. However, especially when it comes to the use of this portrayal in relation to the US position on Nord Stream 2, Nord Stream 2 is also portrayed as an example of a broader problem: that of the US blocking mutually beneficial cooperation between Russia and the EU in an attempt to gain an unfair competitive advantage for its own LNG.

### *Ukraine Transit*

The second geopolitical framing of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline relates to one of the rationales ascribed to the Russian government for constructing this pipeline in the geopolitically-oriented literature: the desire to ‘diversify’ away from reliance on pipelines running through Ukraine (e.g. Kosowska and Kosowski 2016: 760; Vatansever 2017: 8; Charokopos and Dagoumas 2018: 455; Siddi 2020: 549). As this section shows, officials from the Russian government and Gazprom frame transit to Ukraine as a risk for Russian-EU gas trade, which can be mitigated by expanding pipeline capacity on other routes, including by building Nord Stream 2.

In the source material, gas transit through Ukraine is problematized in several different ways. The first of these is expressed most clearly by president Putin in 2016, when he claimed that “не было ни одного случая, чтобы мы срывали поставки. Мы помним 2008–2009 годы, когда поставки были приостановлены, но не по нашей вине, а потому что транзитное государство не обеспечило транзит” (December 5, 2016). Here, Putin refers to the gas crisis in the winter of 2008-2009, when Russian gas stopped flowing to Europe through Ukraine. Although this crisis was the result of a commercial dispute between Gazprom and Ukrainian gas company Naftohaz over the renewal of a

contract on gas supplies and transit, Putin here puts the blame squarely with Kyiv. This same problematization of Ukrainian transit was also expressed by Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov, who claimed in 2018 that: “Имевшие место кризисы были связаны, прежде всего, с поведением транзитных стран” (Lavrov, October 3, 2018). The second way in which Ukrainian gas transit was problematized relates to the technical elements of Ukraine’s gas infrastructure. Minister of Energy Aleksandr Novak claimed in 2015 that: “украинская система газопроводов сильно устарела. Поэтому и возникает вопрос: эффективна ли его модернизация или проще построить новый газопровод” (July 2, 2015). Then-minister of Economic Development Alexey Ulyukayev problematized the transit in a similar way, stating that, because of Ukraine’s under-investment in pipeline infrastructure, “возникают риски и перебоев поставок и техногенных различных катастроф. Это проект, который когда-то должен быть решен - инвестиции в газотранспортную систему Украины. Пока его нет, должна быть диверсификация” (May 24, 2016). In other words, Novak and Ulyukayev claim that Ukraine’s neglect of its gas infrastructure has left it in such a severe state that it poses a fundamental risk to the stability of gas supply to the EU, driving home the necessity of diversifying routes of natural gas transportation, for instance by constructing Nord Stream 2.

As such, this narrative in official Russian rhetoric represents Nord Stream 2 primarily as a means of increasing the energy security of European countries. For instance, MFA spokeswoman Maria Zakharova stressed in 2018 that: “газопровод «Северный поток-2» не подрывает энергетическую безопасность Европы, а как раз укрепляет ее путем диверсификации маршрутов поставок газа, нивелирования транзитных рисков и повышения надежности газоснабжения конечных потребителей” (January 31, 2018). This is also emphasized by Putin, who claimed in 2019 that “Задача [«Северного Потока – 2»] – диверсифицировать маршруты поставок газа, убрать транзитные риски и тем самым укрепить энергетическую безопасность Европы” (October 2, 2019).

In sum, this narrative focuses primarily on the importance of diversification: given the risks of transit through Ukraine, diversification away from the reliance on this route by building the Nord Stream 2 pipeline is not only in the interests of Russia, but also in the interests of EU countries importing Russian gas.

## *Improving Relations*

Another geopolitical framing represents Nord Stream 2 as example of cooperation between Russia and European countries – and Germany in particular. This in spite of EU-Russia economic relations being dominated by a regime of mutual sanctions installed after Russia annexed Crimea and invaded Eastern Ukraine (e.g. Trenin 2021). In particular, this narrative posits Nord Stream 2 as part of a long-standing ‘special’ natural gas relationship between Russia and the EU.

One clear way in which Russian officials place Nord Stream 2 in the context of this ‘special’ energy relationship is by pointing out that piped gas deliveries from the USSR towards Western Europe have taken place since the 1960s.<sup>3</sup> For instance, in 2016, Foreign Minister Lavrov pointed out that “на протяжении долгого времени [энергетика] играла цементирующую роль в российско-европейских отношениях” (October 25, 2016). Furthermore, during a state visit to Germany in 2018, Putin said that: “Что касается проекта «Северный поток – 2», [...] мы обсуждали его в контексте других наших проектов в сфере энергетики. У нас многоплановое сотрудничество в этой сфере, и оно продолжается очень давно, многие десятилетия, и весьма успешно” (May 18, 2018). MFA spokeswoman Maria Zakharova also expressed this confidence in EU-Russian energy cooperation. When asked whether controversy surrounding Nord Stream 2 would hinder its completion, she claimed: “Менялись названия стран, политические системы, а наше взаимодействие по энергетическому треку с европейцами всегда оставалось на самом высоком уровне. Мы никогда их не подводили” (September 23, 2020). In other words, cooperation in matters of natural gas between Russia and the EU has been so successful for such a long time that continuing construction of new natural gas infrastructure, such as Nord Stream 2, is nothing new.

Another way in which the energy relationship between Russia and the EU is used in the rhetoric on Nord Stream 2 is by emphasizing that this relationship is one of mutual dependence. Putin discussed this idea in response to concerns about European countries becoming dependent on Russian gas: “это глупый абсолютно, никчёмный аргумент. Почему? Потому что это взаимозависимость. Если наш покупатель попадает в

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed analysis of the history of EU-Russian gas trade, see Högselius (2013).

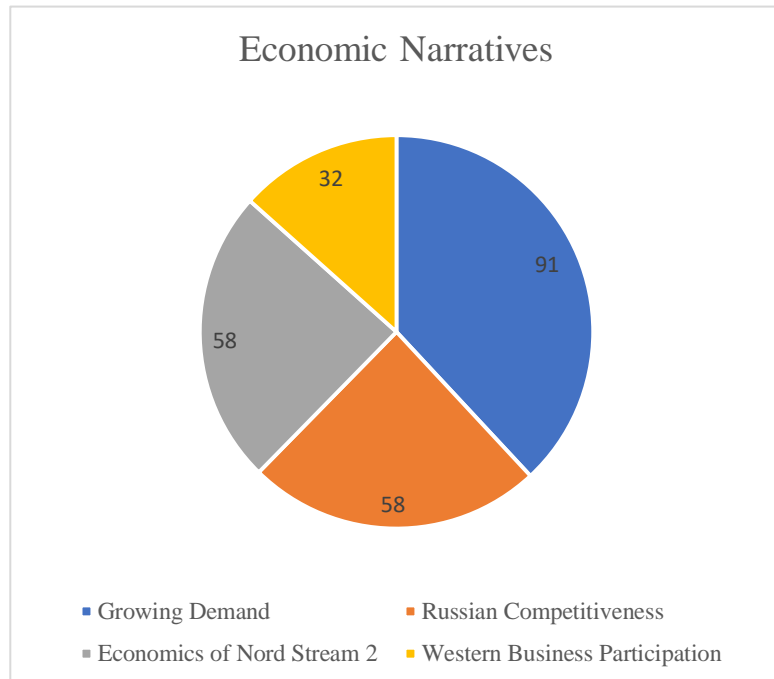
зависимость от продавца, от нас, то мы также попадаем в зависимость от покупателя ” (December 5, 2016). Furthermore, in 2018, Lavrov characterized the Nord Stream 2 pipeline as intended to “повысить уровень позитивной экономической взаимозависимости России и Евросоюза, лежащей в основе обоюдно выгодных отношений и стабильности на европейском континенте” (August 28, 2018). In other words, Nord Stream 2 feeds into a relationship of interdependence, which is considered mutually beneficial.

This framing of Nord Stream 2 as fitting in an existing pattern of successful cooperation and interdependence between Russia and the EU in energy matters is also complemented at times with an even more optimistic note, positing that Nord Stream 2 might be a turning point in the generally poor relations between the two powers. This is seen very clearly in the words of then-Minister for Economic Development Maksim Oreshkin, who argued in 2018 that projects like Nord Stream 2 led to increases in investment and trade between Russia and the EU, which “указывает на ренессанс отношений, несмотря на санкционную тематику” (December 12, 2018). Furthermore, Aleksandr Novak also expressed his confidence in the continuing improvement of gas relations between Russia and the EU: “Мы в этом еще раз убедились, в частности, по беспрецедентной поддержке европейскими пантерами нашего совместного проекта газопровода «Северный поток – 2»” (October 14, 2020). In other words, according to these optimistic voices in the Russian government, Nord Stream 2 is also part of a ‘revival’ in (economic) relations between the two powers, despite the generally poor EU-Russia relations after 2014.

## Economic Framings

In total, 4 economic framings on Nord Stream 2 have been identified in more than 10% of the total source material. The first of these is the ‘Growing Demand’ framing, which claims that European countries will import more Russian gas due to rising demand and slowing gas extraction in EU countries. The second, labeled ‘Russian Competitiveness’

posits that Russian piped gas is the most economically viable source of natural gas for EU countries, both in terms of price as well as in terms of supply volumes. Furthermore, the framing labeled ‘Economics of Nord Stream 2’ posits that this particular pipeline is a more economically viable



way of transporting gas to Western Europe, compared to existing pipelines. Lastly, the framing ‘Western Business Participation’ justifies the project by pointing out the involvement of many (large) energy companies from Western Europe, rather than it just being a project of Gazprom and the Russian government.

### *Growing Demand*

The most frequently used economic framing of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline justifies this expansion of gas pipeline infrastructure by arguing that European countries will need to import more natural gas in the years to come, as demand would be expected to rise and extraction of natural gas in EU countries like the Netherlands is expected to decline.

This idea is expressed most clearly by president Putin during the 2018 “Russian Energy Week” forum: “«Северный поток-2» – это чисто коммерческий проект, хочу это подчеркнуть, связанный с увеличением потребления энергии, в том числе и в



Европе, и с падением собственной добычи в европейских странах. Нужно же где-то брать!» (October 3, 2018). The most concrete numbers for this expected rise are given by Aleksei Miller in his 2018 report for Gazprom shareholders: “Три года назад на годовом собрании акционеров мы отмечали, что к 2035 году потребность Европы в дополнительном импорте газа может составить 150 млрд куб. м. Сегодня мы видим, что только за прошедшие три года импорт в Европу уже увеличился на 67 млрд куб. м. Мы ожидаем, что тенденции сохранятся и реальность превзойдет прогнозы” (June 28, 2019). In other words, Miller expects the rise in natural gas exports to the broader European region to exceed 150 bcm per year by 2035 compared to 2015 levels, which would imply almost a doubling of natural gas supplies by Gazprom to Europe (Gazprom Export, N.D.).

The cause of the falling domestic production of natural gas, according to minister Novak, is found in falling production in the 3 largest gas producers in Europe: the Netherlands, Norway, and the United Kingdom (e.g. Novak, September 8, 2015). In an interview in 2018, Novak claimed that domestic extraction in these countries would fall by 7 bcm annually in the years to come (Novak, October 5, 2018). The primary evidence for this decline in production comes from the Netherlands, where the government announced to cut gas production from the Groningen field from 21 bcm per year in 2017 to 0 in 2030 (Reuters 2018). Based on this development, the International Energy Agency (IEA 2020) expects European gas production to drop by 40% between 2020 and 2025.

Meanwhile, Russian officials expect a rise in demand for natural gas in Europe, primarily because of the ‘greening’ of the European energy mix, with countries moving towards less polluting energy sources. This is noted for instance in Miller’s report to Gazprom shareholders for 2018 (Miller, June 28, 2019). According to Lavrov, this is seen most prominently in Germany, which has also phased out nuclear energy: “Германия взяла принципиальную линию на отказ от ядерной энергетики, и если это не газ, то это уголь. Знаю, что доля угля в энергобалансе Германии будет возрастать, но это, наверное, не очень полезно для экологии. Поэтому роль «Северного потока» как реального поставщика экологически чистого топлива, я думаю, в Германии оценили,” (August 15, 2016). This expectation of increased gas demand in Europe is questioned by the IEA, which has projected an increasing decline in gas demand in Europe by 2040 in recent years (Elliott 2020). However, according to

research by the independent energy consultant Rystad Energy in late 2020, gas demand in Germany is projected to increase by 20 bcm between 2020 and 2034, which would (at least partially) confirm Lavrov's expectations (Rystad Energy 2020).

In other words, the Nord Stream 2 pipeline would be justified by a combination of expected growth in demand for gas in Europe (and Germany in particular) and an expected decline in gas extraction in European countries (in particular the Netherlands). While the latter of these is also confirmed by non-Russian sources, the former expectation is more questionable based on projections from international energy experts.

### *Russian Competitiveness*

The second economic framing of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline builds on the first argument by claiming that Russian piped gas is the most competitive source of natural gas for Europe in terms of price. We can clearly see the shifting emphasis to competitive prices on the European gas market – identified by scholars like Loe (2019) and Abbas and Locatelli (2020) – reflected in this narrative on the pipeline.

President Putin phrased this idea most clearly in 2018, explaining why Nord Stream 2 is an economic necessity for Europe: “Россия является самым оптимальным поставщиком для европейской экономики. Мы готовы конкурировать со всеми. Надеемся на честную конкуренцию в рамках действующих международных правовых норм” (August 22, 2018).

What is noticeable, furthermore, is that Nord Stream 2 is also argued to promote competition on the European gas market, an idea that was also expressed by minister Novak in 2020: “[Северный Поток-2] стимулирует конкуренцию. Ведь чем больше будет вариантов поставок, тем больше у потребителей будет выбор поставщиков и маршрутов поставки, и тем дешевле им это будет обходиться” (June 20, 2020). In other words, Russian officials expressed the idea that Nord Stream 2 would increase competition on the European gas market, while also expressing confidence that Russian piped gas would do well in this competitive market, also in line with current trends of expanding market share for this type of gas in recent years, identified among others by Abbas and Locatelli (2020).

When it comes to the nature of the competition faced by Russia on the European gas market, Russian officials point primarily at LNG from the US, usually pointing out the lack of price competitiveness of this source of gas. For instance, Russian permanent representative to the EU Vladimir Chizhov noted in 2017 that: “По сегодняшним прикидкам, цена за 1000 кубометров американского СПГ на европейском рынке будет составлять примерно 250 долларов.<sup>4</sup> Это невыгодно европейцам, поскольку российский газ обходится примерно вдвое дешевле” (August 23, 2017). President Putin, citing a different figure, points out the importance of Nord Stream 2 by arguing that the economic consequences of not constructing the pipeline would be significant for countries like Germany: “Потому что другой вариант (покупка более дорогого первичного энергоносителя – американского сжиженного газа – по цене на 20 процентов выше, чем наш трубный газ) – что это означает? Снижение конкурентоспособности германской экономики и повышение цен для домохозяйств. Вот и всё,” (December 17, 2020). As such, Nord Stream 2 is represented as necessary for the European market, considering Russian piped gas is by far the most competitive means of supplying Europe with its growing demand for natural gas imports.

### *Economic Sense of Nord Stream 2*

Another economic argument Russian officials have used to justify the construction of Nord Stream 2 is that it is the most economically efficient route to transport gas from the Gazprom’s gas fields to (North-)Western Europe. There are several different arguments they use for why this would be the case, but the most notable consequence they mention is that continued gas transit through other routes (like the pipelines through Ukraine) is dependent on the competitiveness of these routes compared to Nord Stream 2.

Gazprom CEO Miller discussed several arguments why Nord Stream 2 would be more economically efficient than existing pipelines from Russia to Europe at the St. Petersburg Economic Forum in 2016: “[1.] Происходит смещение ресурсной базы «Газпрома» в северном направлении [...] [2.] Стоимость доставки газа до

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<sup>4</sup> СПГ (Сжиженный Природный Газ) - LNG.

Германии по маршруту с Ямала через «Северный поток — 2» в 1,6–2 раза [...] ниже, чем по маршруту через ГТС Украины.<sup>5</sup> [...] [3.] Экологические выбросы для маршрута с Ямала через «Северный поток — 2» в 5,6 раза ниже, чем для маршрута через Украину,” (June 16, 2016). Thus, compared to existing pipelines through Ukraine, Nord Stream 2 is a shorter route from Gazprom’s newer gas fields on the Yamal Peninsula (near the Arctic Sea), leading to cheaper gas for importers, and it is less polluting than existing routes. Especially the first of these three reasons is mentioned more often, for instance by Minister Lavrov, who pointed out that: “протяжённость маршрута от Ямала до Германии на 2000 км короче, чем нынешняя труба, которая идет до Германии через Украину” (February 17, 2018). Furthermore, Energy Minister Novak emphasized the modern technology used in the construction of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline: “Это трубы большого диаметра, это высокое давление, высокая скорость передачи газа, низкие потери” (February 26, 2019). In short, due to modern technology used, as well as the shorter distance between the Yamal gas fields and Germany through this pipeline, Nord Stream 2 would be the most efficient way of transporting Russian gas to Germany and (North-)Western Europe.

The conclusion some officials draw from this is that the construction of Nord Stream 2 implies competition for other pipeline routes, in particular gas transit through Ukraine. Already in 2015, president Putin stipulated conditions for continued gas transit through Ukraine after construction of Nord Stream 2: “Надёжность, рыночный характер функционирования газотранспортной системы, правовое и административное регулирование по самым высоким стандартам. Наши украинские партнёры способны сделать то же самое, что мы делаем с европейскими партнёрами по «Северному потоку»? Способны – мы будем дальше с ними работать. Не способны – тогда посмотрим, что с этим делать” (December 17, 2015). Additionally, minister Novak expressed the idea of competition between pipelines more explicitly: “Если будут предложены конкурентные условия и по цене, и по надёжности поставок газа по маршрутам, которые сегодня используются, то наша компания «Газпром» готова вести переговоры с владельцами газотранспортной инфраструктуры Украины. Вопрос в том, что в любом случае независимо ни от чего, на наш взгляд, должны быть альтернативные возможности поставок в

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<sup>5</sup> ГТС (Газотранспортная Система) – Gas Transit System.

Европу. Это создает конкуренцию, которая позволяет повышать эффективность, снижать издержки, в том числе и для европейских потребителей” (October 9, 2017).

In other words, Russian officials framed Nord Stream 2 as a pipeline that would be a more economically efficient way of transporting gas from Russia to Europe than existing pipeline infrastructure. This would also imply competition in price and reliability with existing pipeline routes, such as the one through Ukraine.

### *Western Business Participation*

The least-used economic justification for the Nord Stream 2 pipeline is the argument that the project was not initiated by the Russian government, but by a consortium of companies, including Gazprom and several European energy companies. Although the 5 European shareholder companies withdrew from the project after a Polish antitrust case in 2016, they soon returned to the project as investors (Eckert and Vukmanovic 2016), meaning the Russian side continues to argue that the pipeline is not a Russian geopolitical project, but a joint economic project between Gazprom and Western European partners.

The idea that Nord Stream 2 was not an initiative of the Russian government was expressed already in 2015 by Russian representative to the EU Chizhov: “«Северный поток – 2» - это коммерческий проект, инициатором которого было не Правительство России и, открою большой секрет, даже не "Газпром", а европейские энергокомпании, которые в реализации этого проекта видят для себя прямую экономическую выгоду” (December 25, 2015). Foreign Minister Lavrov also emphasized that the pipeline is “не российская инициатива, а [...] инициатива компаний ряда стран Евросоюза, которую характеризуют, по крайней мере в Германии, как сугубо коммерческую и не имеющую никакой политической подоплеки” (May 25, 2016).

After the Western companies became financiers of the pipeline, rather than partners in the consortium, this narrative shifted towards one that emphasized the commercial nature of the project, with Miller for instance stating that the “Финансовые обязательства европейских компаний подчеркивают стратегическую важность

проекта «Северный поток — 2» для европейского газового рынка» (April 24, 2017). President Putin used this same argument, claiming that: “Это чисто экономический и, более того, чисто коммерческий проект, потому что участники этого проекта считают свои прибыли, экономические выигрыши от его реализации и приходят к выводу о том, что такая реализация целесообразна” (February 28, 2018). Thus, the participation of companies from Western Europe in the Nord Stream 2 project would demonstrate that it is a solely commercial project. Furthermore, which Western companies are involved in Nord Stream 2 was also characterized as being of importance, for instance by Energy Minister Novak: “[Северный Поток – 2] реализуется «Газпромом» в консорциуме с другими европейскими компаниями Франции, Англии, Голландии, Германии. И эти мировые компании, те же Engie, Shell и другие, они бы не реализовывали этот проект, если бы это было коммерчески неинтересно” (February 26, 2019).

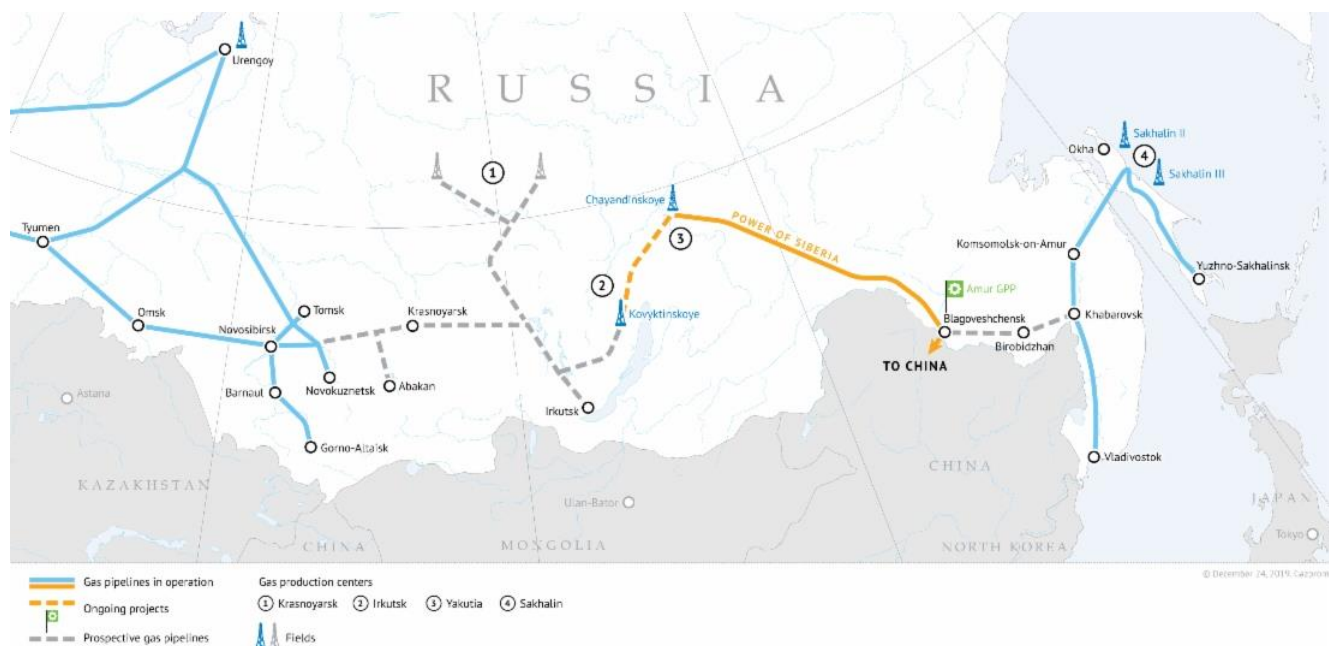
In other words, Russian officials claim that the participation of major European energy companies in the Nord Stream 2 project shows that the pipeline is not just a Russian project. Although this framing is used relatively little, it is found among a range of Russian officials, demonstrating that it is still of relevance in understanding the Russian position on the pipeline.

## Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, the Russian government’s representation of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline is characterized by a variety of different framings, both underpinned by geopolitical arguments as well as economic ones. From complaints about undue political interference from countries like the US to arguments that growing demand for gas in Western Europe make the new pipeline an economic necessity, different reasonings are widespread in Russian rhetoric on the pipeline, with neither type of reasoning much more frequent than the other. This in contrast to the picture painted in the broader literature discussed previously, which tends to frame Russia’s position on this pipeline as – in essence – either a geopolitical or an economic project.

# The Power of Siberia Pipeline

This chapter presents the results of the qualitative content analysis of Russian officials' statements on the Power of Siberia pipeline. This pipeline, running almost 3000 kilometers between the Chayandinskoye gas field in the south of the Sakha Republic and the Russian-Chinese border near the city of Blagoveshchensk (Amur Oblast'), is part of a \$400 billion gas deal between Russia and China signed in 2014 – although president Putin has planned to exploit the Chayandinskoye field since 2012 (Интерфакс 2012). As part of this deal, this pipeline will be used to supply China with 38 bcm of Russian gas annually for 30 years. Gas started flowing through the pipeline in December 2019 (e.g. Cohen 2019). Gazprom plans to expand the pipeline both towards existing gas pipelines in Western Siberia, as well as to the existing pipeline running from Sakhalin Island to Vladivostok (Gazprom N.D., see map).

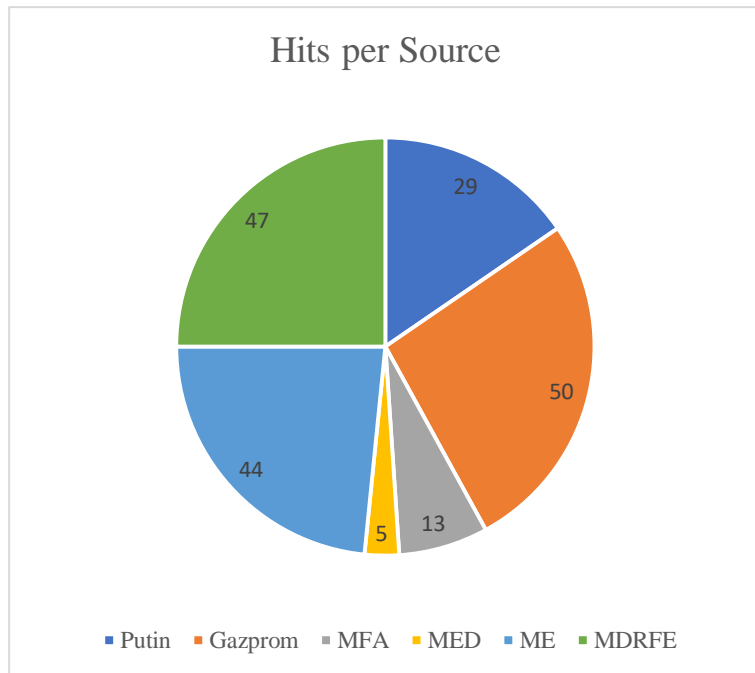


Gas Pipelines in the Russian Far East (Power of Siberia in orange). Source: Gazprom, N.D.

In total, this research has identified 188 occasions on which Russian officials have commented on the Power of Siberia pipeline. This data is taken from the timespan between 2012 and the end of 2020. In addition to the institutions and individuals surveyed in the previous chapter, this research also considers official statements from the MDRFE. Aside from officials of this ministry itself, the site of this ministry

(minvr.gov.ru) also frequently quotes local officials from the regions of the Far East, including from the Sakha Republic and the Amur Oblast', the two regions the Power of Siberia pipeline crosses. Statements from such officials found on the MDRFE's website are also taken into account here.

This chapter applies the same QCA method as the previous one, with the different geopolitical and economic framings of the pipeline being formulated



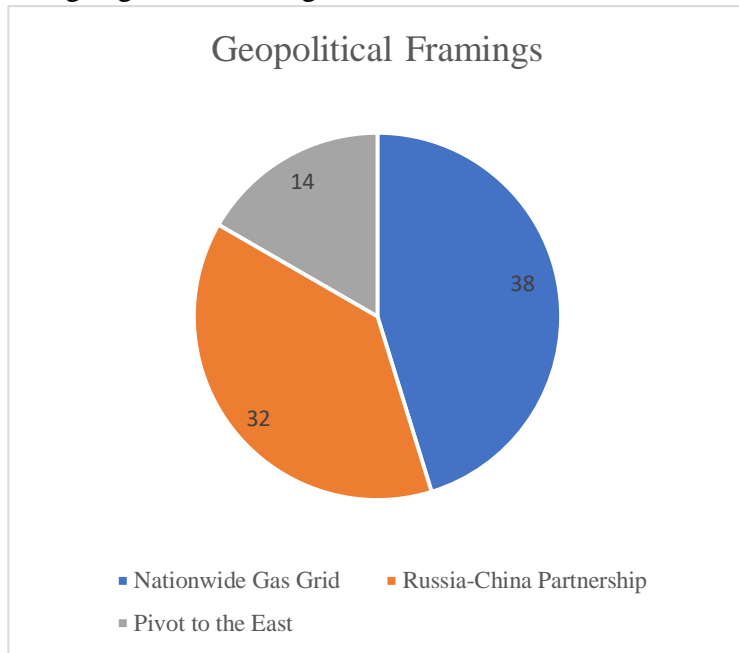
based on the statements researched. One adjustment has been made in the selection of framings to be discussed. While 3 economic framings were mentioned in at least 10% of the total occasions surveyed (i.e. at least 19 times), this applied to only 2 of the geopolitical framings. However, because of the importance of Russia's 'Pivot to Asia' in the literature examined in this thesis, the narrative which represents the Power of Siberia as part of Russia's broader Pivot to Asia – rather than just its relations with China – is also briefly discussed, despite being used only 14 times.



## Geopolitical Framings

As mentioned, this research on the Russian official rhetoric on the Power of Siberia pipeline discusses three geopolitical framings of the pipeline. The most frequently identified geopolitical framing, called “Nationwide Gas Grid”, discusses the Power of Siberia as a first step towards a gas grid connecting Western and Eastern Russia, and also Europe and China.

The second, called “Russia-China Partnership”, discusses the Power of Siberia pipeline as an example of bilateral cooperation between Russian and China, a sign of improving relations between these powers. Thirdly, the “Pivot to the East”



framing considers the pipeline as a part of Russia’s wider strategic turn towards the Asia-Pacific region.

### *Nationwide Gas Grid*

This framing of the Power of Siberia pipeline relates to the opportunities of further expanding this pipeline, connecting it with the gas pipeline network in Western Russia. As Sharples (2016: 885) points out, Russia’s gas industry is still divided between a Western and Eastern network, with no interconnecting pipelines. Furthermore, a pipeline bringing gas to China from the same Western Siberia gas fields that also source Russia’s European gas exports could force Europe and China to compete for the same Russian gas (Sharples 2016: 904). While these opportunities are of course in part economic, the strategic opportunities provided by (this expansion of) the Power of Siberia pipeline are discussed frequently by Russian officials.

As president Putin announced the construction of a new pipeline in the Far East in 2012, he already stated that: “В будущем предполагается соединить восточную часть газопроводной системы и западную” (December 27, 2012). The president has continued to emphasize the opportunity of an interconnected gas grid, including in 2019: “Наша задача – [...] соединить эти системы – западную часть и восточную, с тем чтобы можно было осуществлять перетоки и одновременно работать и внутри страны, и на внешние рынки иметь возможность работать очень гибко. При конъюнктуре соответствующей – в Европу, при определённой конъюнктуре на Востоке – на Восток больше направлять,” (“Пресс-конференция...”, April 27, 2019). From these statements, it is clear that president considers the creation of an interconnected gas grid as an opportunity for Russia, with him clearly hinting at the idea that this would force Europe and China to compete for the same Russian gas.

Another important element of the Power of Siberia pipeline, especially in negotiations with the Chinese side, is the possibility of a ‘Power of Siberia 2’ pipeline bringing gas from Russia’s West Siberian gas fields to China, either crossing the Russian-Chinese border into Western China in the Altai Region, or crossing through Mongolia. As this project would also connect the Western Siberian gas fields to China, this would also connect Russia’s pipelines to Europe to (one of) Russia’s pipelines to China. Already in 2014, Aleksei Miller announced that “В текущих переговорах главный приоритет — „западный“ маршрут. [...] Проект „Алтай“ имеет очень высокую степень готовности к началу строительства,” (October 10, 2014). In 2015, president Putin, discussing Russia’s strategic objectives in energy matters, called the ‘Altai’ pipeline “безусловный приоритет на ближайшую перспективу,” (September 1, 2015). In the years to follow, Miller emphasized that Gazprom was close to reaching an agreement on the ‘Western route’ with their Chinese counterparts: “Там остается буквально только один вопрос — это вопрос цены,” (October 4, 2018). However, in 2019, president Putin requested Gazprom look into a new route for the ‘western’ pipeline to China: “Посмотрите, пожалуйста, еще и на запасы Ямала, чтобы собрать необходимые запасы для этих поставок по «западному» маршруту на Китай через Монголию,” (September 9, 2019). In March 2020, Miller reported back to Putin on this route, stating: “Проведен предварительный технико-экономический анализ, который дал положительный ответ о том, что это целесообразно,” (March 27, 2020). In other words, Putin and Miller discussed the possibility of gas from the Yamal

peninsula, which was originally intended to be exported largely to Europe via pipelines like Yamal-Europe (an existing pipeline running to Germany through Belarus and Poland) (BBC 2012). Thus, this plan, once again, hints at the future competition between Europe and China for Russia's gas resources.

In other words, this framing of the pipeline emphasizes that the reaching of a deal with the Chinese on a 'Power of Siberia – 2' pipeline, which would connect Russia's Eastern and Western gas infrastructure, as well as connect Russia's Western Siberian gas fields (now used for export primarily to Europe) with China.

### *Russia-China Partnership*

The second geopolitical framings of the Power of Siberia pipeline relates to relations between Russia and China which, as argued in the literature (e.g. Cox 2016: 329-330; Lukin 2016: 579; Charap et al. 2017: 36), have become increasingly important for Moscow since the 2014 annexation of Crimea led to deteriorating relations with Western countries. This framing represents the pipeline as an important step in developing Russo-Chinese partnership, both in energy and more broadly.

One of the ways in which this comes to the fore in Russian official rhetoric is by representing the Power of Siberia pipeline as a start of a Russian-Chinese "energy alliance". Gazprom CEO Miller, upon signing the 30-year contract with China in 2014, claimed that: "Сегодня мы открыли первую страницу толстого тома увлекательной истории российско-китайского сотрудничества в газовой сфере, в которую мы ещё напишем много важных глав" (May 21, 2014). In 2015, president Putin first used the term "energy alliance", stating: "Наши страны последовательно продвигаются к формированию стратегического энергетического альянса, который, уверен, будет играть заметную роль в международных экономических отношениях" (September 1, 2015). Not long before the start of gas transportation through the pipeline, energy minister Novak claimed, furthermore, that: "Фактически есть все основания говорить о формировании российско-китайского энергетического альянса" (November 14, 2019). In other words, the construction of the Power of Siberia pipeline would be the start of a Russo-Chinese "energy alliance", with – at least according to Putin – significant implications for world energy markets.

However, the framing of the pipeline in terms of a strengthening Russo-Chinese partnership goes beyond the energy sector. According to several Russian officials, this cooperation in the natural gas sector will ‘spill over’ into other aspects of cooperation. For instance, Miller claimed in 2017 that: “Без сомнения, стальные артерии магистральных газопроводов и тысячекилометровые транспортные коридоры станут символом расширения стратегического сотрудничества и взаимосвязанности России и Китая в XXI веке, примером для всего мира” (May 16, 2017). Aside from these poetic words, president Putin also connected the pipeline to more concrete goals: “[“Сила Сибири”] приближает нас к решению поставленной вместе с Председателем КНР Си Цзиньпином задачи доведения двустороннего товарооборота в 2024 году до 200 миллиардов долларов”<sup>6</sup> (December 2, 2019). This goal would mean that trade turnover between Russia and China would almost double by 2024 compared to 2019 (ОЕС, N.D.). According to a press release from the MFA on diplomatic achievements of 2019, the inauguration of the Power of Siberia was an example of the “Углубление российско-китайских отношений всеобъемлющего партнерства и стратегического взаимодействия,” which “дополняло процессы евразийской интеграции и оказывало стабилизирующее влияние на международную обстановку” (December 30, 2019). In other words, the Russo-Chinese cooperation in energy matters would be a driver of improved relations in other spheres, including of a boom in trade between the countries.

### *“Pivot to the East”*

The last geopolitical framing of the Power of Siberia pipeline relates to a broader change in Russia’s geopolitical orientation – its ‘Pivot to the East’. In other words, as discussed in the literature review, Russia would be moving its geopolitical focus away from Western countries, and towards countries in the Asia-Pacific, with their large (and generally growing) demand for energy resources. According to Foreign Minister Lavrov, “Будущее России как крупнейшей евразийской державы, две трети территории которой находится в Азии, неразрывно связано с АТР,”<sup>7</sup> with the Power of Siberia giving investors “уникальные возможности для работы на

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<sup>6</sup> КНР (Китайская Народная Республика) – Chinese People’s Republic

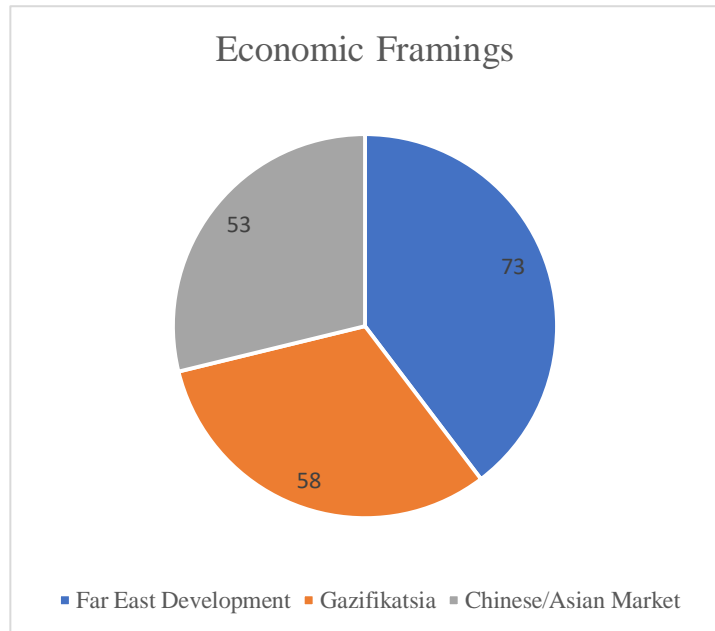
<sup>7</sup> АТР (Азиатско-Тихоокеанский регион) – the Asia-Pacific region.

российском рынке и, что важно, выгодный плацдарм для прямого выхода на емкий растущий рынок АТР,” (August 5, 2015). In other words, projects like the Power of Siberia are argued to be an important part of Russia developing its energy relations with the broad Asia-Pacific region. This is also emphasized by Putin, who claimed that “Россия, обладающая колоссальной ресурсной базой, способна обеспечить ускоренный рост экономики стран АТР. Хочу обратить внимание, что создание энергомоста Россия – АТР – наша общая стратегическая задача,” (September 4, 2015). Furthermore, in 2019, Putin spoke of the necessity of “формирование общей энергетической инфраструктуры” on the Eurasian continent, adding that “Россия активно занимается расширением сети трансграничных нефте- и газопроводов,” (“Заседание круглого стола...”, April 27, 2019). Although the need to increase energy ties between Russia and the Asia-Pacific region is emphasized in relation to the Power of Siberia pipeline, this only rarely represented as ‘diversification’ away from Russia’s traditional European market for selling natural gas, with minister Novak only mentioning in passing that the start of gas exports through the Power of Siberia pipeline “способствует диверсификации нашего экспорта,” (December 30, 2019). In short, the Power of Siberia pipeline is also – at times – discussed as part of a broader geopolitical “Pivot to the East”, in terms of wanting to improve energy relations with the Asia-Pacific. However, this narrative is not used nearly as frequently as the one related to bilateral Russian/Chinese relations in particular.

## Economic Framings

In total, 3 economic framings of the pipeline have been mentioned on at least 19 occasions between 2012 and 2020. Of these, the most frequently used framing, labeled “Far East Development”, posits that the Power of Siberia pipeline brings economic benefits through the regions of Russia through which it runs.

Very closely related to the first framing, the second framing – called ‘gazifikatsia’ – considers the Power of Siberia pipeline in terms of the opportunities it provides to connect cities and towns in the Russian Far East to the gas grid. Thirdly, there is the framing which considers the Power of Siberia pipeline as



Russia taking its share in the growing Chinese – and broader Asia-Pacific – markets for natural gas.

### *Far East Development*

In this first, and most frequent, economic framing of the Power of Siberia pipeline, the emphasis is on the economic benefits that this pipeline brings to the regions it passes through – the Sakha Republic and Amur Oblast’ – as well as to the Russian economy in general. On both of these levels, several economic arguments are used about the pipeline.

Firstly, especially regional officials in the two aforementioned Far Eastern regions of Russia have pointed out that their regional economies are expected to grow significantly because of projects like the Power of Siberia pipeline. For instance, governor Borisov of the Sakha Republic claimed in 2017 that “достигнем показателя уровня валового регионального продукта в объеме 1 трлн рублей в ближайшие годы. Этому способствует, что на территории Якутии реализуются крупные инвестиционные

проекты, среди которых строительство газопровода «Сила Сибири»,» (December 7, 2017). Furthermore, Amur Oblast' governor Vasili Orlov claimed that, partially due to the Power of Siberia pipeline, “Валовый региональный продукт вырастет, более того, мы видим похожую динамику в горизонте ближайших шести лет. А в некоторые годы рост экономики составит до 15% в год” (August 8, 2018). In another analysis of the regional economy of the Amur Oblast', the previous governor, Aleksandr Kozlov, argued that projects like the pipeline ensured that “Амурская область переходит от своей традиционной сельскохозяйственной специализации к индустриальной,” (April 10, 2017).

Secondly, Russian officials have made the argument that this large-scale infrastructural project also creates opportunities for local businesses. Especially, according to Minister for Eastern Development Aleksandr Galushka, the project “формирует большой потенциальный спрос на услуги нашего дальневосточного малого бизнеса,” (April 16, 2015). A similar expectation was expressed by president Putin, who said that “изменение ситуации в электроэнергетике, газоснабжения в регионе создаст гораздо более благоприятные условия и для развития бизнеса” (April 7, 2016).

Thirdly, officials emphasize the amount of jobs created by a large infrastructural project like the Power of Siberia. For instance, Gazprom CEO Miller claimed that “Уже в настоящее время в Дальневосточном федеральном округе [...], «Газпромом» создано 9,2 тыс. рабочих мест. С вводом в эксплуатацию Чаяндинского месторождения, Амурского газоперерабатывающего завода, «Силы Сибири» добавится еще 4,8 тыс. рабочих мест,” (September 7, 2017).

According to the Russian government officials, the pipeline does not only provide economic benefits for the inhabitants of the Sakha and Amur regions, but also for large sectors of the Russian economy as a whole. Gazprom has stated that, for the construction of the Power of Siberia pipeline, it makes use of “современного высокотехнологичного оборудования в первую очередь отечественного производства,” (April 19, 2016) – that is, the company wants to use primarily Russian-produced materials for its pipeline project. As such, Aleksei Miller has claimed that the project gives an “импульс для развития целых отраслей российской экономики: металлургии, трубной промышленности, машиностроения,” (September 1, 2014). Furthermore, Energy Minister Novak also claimed that “развитие энергетики в

Восточной Сибири, на Дальнем Востоке в конечном итоге приведет к раскрытию индустриального потенциала России,” (September 8, 2016), and that “В целом газопровод стал важнейшим этапом в развитии транспортной инфраструктуры и напрямую соединил сырье, производство и потребителей, что повышает конкурентоспособность газовой отрасли России,” (February 10, 2020). In other words, the Power of Siberia pipeline project has given an impetus to sectors of the economy related to the production of gas-related technology, such as the metallurgical factories constructing the pipes.

Thus, the Power of Siberia pipeline is argued to provide many economic benefits to the Sakha and Amur regions in particular – in terms of growth of their regional economies, opportunities for local business, and creation of jobs –, but also to the Russian gas industry in general.

### *‘Gazifikatsiya’*

The Russian word *‘Gazifikatsiya’* (*Газификация*) - which is left without translation as its English equivalent ‘gasification’ refers exclusively to a chemical process – means (at least in this case) the connection of Russian villages, towns and cities to the natural gas grid. Since the mid-2000s, Gazprom has been tasked with implementing a set of government projects aimed at increasing the level of ‘gazifikatsiya’ throughout Russia.<sup>8</sup> According to Gazprom itself, the percentage of the Russian population connected to the gas grid has grown from 53% to 71% since the start of this program (Газпром Межрегионгаз, N.D.). However, in the Russian Far East, according to Russian prime minister Mishustin, this percentage stands at merely 18% (РИА Новости 2021). It should come as no surprise, therefore, that Russian officials have represented the Power of Siberia pipeline as a means of increasing the level of ‘gazifikatsia’ in the regions on its route to China.

This idea of the Power of Siberia pipeline being used for ‘gazifikatsia’ has been prevalent since the first idea of a new pipeline in the Far East was expressed by president Putin. In 2012, he stated that, with the new pipeline, “Частично можно будет реализовывать на экспорт, [...] но в основном для внутренних потребителей

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<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed analysis of this program, see Tynkkynen (2016).



российских. Это хорошая, действительно, инвестиция,” (December 27, 2012). Afterwards, the ‘gazifikatsia’ aspect of the pipeline remained of importance in official rhetoric. For example, in 2016, prime minister Medvedev, talking about the pipeline, claimed that: “самое главное, может быть, для людей – газифицировать структуру, жизнь просто по всему маршруту. Этого люди ждут на Дальнем Востоке,” (quoted by ME, April 19, 2016). In 2017, president Putin also said that the pipeline allows Russia to “не только выполнить наши обязательства по экспорту, но и расширить газификацию Якутской области и начать газификацию Амурской области, здесь сегодня практически ноль,” (August 3, 2017). Meanwhile, energy minister Novak even went so far as to state that “Маршрут магистрального газопровода запроектирован таким образом, чтобы газифицировать максимальное количество населённых пунктов,” (August 3, 2017). As these statements show, the bringing of natural gas to the remote villages and towns along the Power of Siberia is an important argument Russian officials use for the pipeline.

However, there are also some more critical voices in the Russian government in this regard, with minister for Far Eastern Development Kozlov claiming that: “Трасса — это хорошо, но от трассы нужно подвести газ в населенные пункты и развести его в населённых пунктах. Это очень дорогостоящее мероприятие” (February 7, 2019). According to Kozlov, no pipelines connecting inhabited areas with the main Power of Siberia pipeline had been constructed by mid-2020: “запущен магистральный газопровод «Сила Сибири», но газ в дальневосточные регионы так и не пришёл” (August 14, 2020).

So far, Gazprom has published which exact population centers it plans to connect to the Power of Siberia pipeline, in both the Sakha Republic (November 30, 2018), as well as the Amur Oblast’ (September 28, 2020). According to 2020 data from state statistics agency Rosstat, the population of the largest of the towns in the Sakha Republic – Aldan and Olyokminsk – combined stood at under 30.000 people (Росстат, N.D.). The places reached by the pipeline in the Amur Oblast’ are more populous, including Blagoveshchensk – with a population of around 230.000 (Росстат N.D.). In short, the idea that the Power of Siberia pipeline would lead to increased levels of ‘gazifikatsia’ in the Russian Far East played an important role in official rhetoric, despite the fact that – as of 1 year after the start of exports to China through the pipeline – no town or village in these regions has actually been connected yet.

## *Chinese/Asian Market*

The last, and perhaps most straightforward, framing of the Power of Siberia pipeline discusses the pipeline as Russia entering into a new market – that of the Asia-Pacific region as a whole, and China in particular – for exporting its natural gas.

In 2014, energy minister Novak summed up the gas delivery contract with China as follows: “Мы диверсифицировали поставки газа на восток, открываем реально новый рынок, будет построена новая инфраструктура на десятки лет вперед, а может, и больше. В Китае будет рост энергопотребления. Недавно были в Индии, у них из 1,2 млрд человек 400 млн просто не имеют доступа к электроэнергии. Индия — еще один огромный рынок, [...] есть поручение рассмотреть строительство газопровода в Индию,” (December 22, 2014). The eventual objective of this diversification of exports towards the Asia-Pacific, according to Novak, would be that “[к] 2020 г. Предполагается увеличение доли стран АТР в структуре экспорта российского газа с 7 до 19 % с последующим ростом до 41 % к 2035 году,” (September 4, 2015).

The justifications for this shift towards the Asia-Pacific gas markets is expected growth in gas demand in this region. The vast majority of statements on this market, however, emphasize growth in China in particular. For instance, in 2016, Putin remarked: “Да, [Сила Сибири -] это большие инвестиции, но это огромный китайский рынок, растущий. [...] Экономика китайская растёт, и мы знаем, что она нуждается в этих энергоресурсах. Это работа на будущее,” (October 12, 2016). As Aleksei Miller claimed in 2018, “спрос на газ в Китае вырос на 15,3%, а за время с начала года по сегодняшний день — на 17,5%. Эти цифры впечатляют, и впечатляют очень сильно,” (October 4, 2018), adding later that “[Китай -] это самый динамичный, самый быстрорастущий рынок природного газа в мире. И мы видим большие перспективы для поставок российского газа,” (March 12, 2019).

This image of a rapidly growing demand for natural gas in China is confirmed by the IEA, with a report from 2020 estimating that China’s gas demand will grow by 60 bcm per year after the end of the Covid-19 crisis, driven primarily by policies meant to reduce the use of polluting coal in electricity generation (IEA 2020). This trend was also emphasized by minister Novak in 2020: “Сегодня политика большинства государств направлена на «очищение энергобалансов» за счет поступательного

перехода на газ, этому тренду следуют и страны АТР, в том числе и крупнейший азиатский потребитель газа – КНР. [...] спрос на природный газ в этом регионе будет расти значительными темпами как минимум до 2050 года” (February 10, 2020). In other words, Russian officials expect gas demand in the Asia-Pacific region (or, more exactly, China’s gas market) to grow at a fast pace for a significant amount of time in the future, which provides export opportunities Russia should not miss out on.

### Conclusion

As we have seen, Russian officials have used several different narratives in discussing the Power of Siberia pipeline. In this case, they clearly made more use of economic framings than of geopolitical ones. The narratives which emphasized the potential of the pipeline for the development of the Far Eastern regions, either in general economic terms or in terms of connecting these regions to the gas grid, enjoyed particular popularity among the officials surveyed. Furthermore, both in terms of geopolitical and economic framings, the emphasis lay decidedly on political and economic relations with China, rather than with the broader Asia-Pacific region.

## Discussion

This chapter interprets the data discussed in the previous two chapters in light of the main research question of this thesis, as well as going further into the implications of these findings. It does this both in terms of the individual pipelines, as well as making more general observations about the geopolitics and economics of Russia's natural gas exports. When it comes to the main research question of this thesis, the findings on both pipelines demonstrate that – in both cases – both geopolitical and economic framings both feature prominently in official rhetoric among Russian officials surveyed, although, in the case of the Power of Siberia pipeline, economic framings have been used more frequently.

This study on Russian rhetoric concerning these two gas pipelines calls into question the divide between 'geopolitical' and 'market-based' theoretical approaches in the study of international energy relations, which we have seen in the literature review (e.g. Dudau and Nedelcu 2016; Judge and Maltby 2017: 184; Wilson 2019: 115-6). At least when it comes to rhetoric from Russian officials on these two pipelines, geopolitical and economic factors seem to co-exist more than the literature suggests. Rather, the results of this research are in line with expectations expressed by scholars critical of this divide – such as Stoddard (2013), Wilson (2019), as well as Goldthau and Sitter (2020:13) – who argued that looking at energy policy at the domestic level, taking into account domestic narratives representing energy policy in geopolitical and economic terms, could reveal a much more nuanced picture of the dynamics of international energy trade. In fact, this research has found that not only are there both geopolitical and economic logics present in Russian rhetoric, how often they appear and in what form also depends very heavily on the individual pipeline. In other words, the exact influence of geopolitical and economic narratives on energy policy may not only depend on the domestic factors of the country making the policy, but also on the specific gas exporting project in question. As such, it is worthwhile to also discuss the findings of this study on both pipelines individually.

## Nord Stream 2

As noted already, this research has shown that Russian official rhetoric on Nord Stream 2 consists of a variety of different framings, with geopolitically and economically-based framings being used approximately as frequently.

To start with how the pipeline is discussed in Russian rhetoric in geopolitical terms. Here, especially the framing ‘Ukraine Transit’ fits particularly well with the expectation from scholars of the geopolitical school of thought on Russian gas policy. This strand of literature argues that Gazprom and the Russian government want to limit Ukraine’s importance as a gas transit country, thus increasing Russia’s leverage over Ukraine (e.g. Kosowska and Kosowski 2016: 760; Vatansever 2017: 8; Charokopos and Dagoumas 2018: 455; Siddi 2020: 549), and as such tries to represent Ukraine as an unreliable transit country (e.g. Tichý 2019: 190; De Jong et al. 2020: 1). This could be seen very clearly in the evidence from the ‘Ukraine Transit’ frame, with Russian officials blaming Ukraine for past problems with gas transit to Europe, and representing the country as a constant threat to gas deliveries to the EU.

However, the ‘Ukraine Transit’ framing is not the primary geopolitical framing this research has identified on Nord Stream 2. The most frequently identified framing – ‘Undue Political Influence’ – criticizes the ‘politicization’ of the pipeline by its opponents. This framing became particularly prevalent when the US introduced sanctions on the Nord Stream 2 project, a move Russian officials claim is primarily motivated by a desire to sell (more expensive) American LNG in Europe. This strong rhetoric towards those opposed to the project is combined with a much more positive rhetoric towards the pipeline’s proponents – the ‘Improving Relations’ framing. Here, the long history of EU-Russian gas trade, as well as Nord Stream 2’s potential for improving (economic) relations between the EU and Russia take center stage. The combination of these two framings bears a striking resemblance to the broad interpretation of Russia’s ‘energy weapon’ (e.g. Newnham 2011: 142; Orttung and Overland 2011: 84; Wigell and Vihma 2016: 615), which sees Russia using its energy resources as either a ‘carrot’ or a ‘stick’ to drive a wedge between more Russia-sympathetic countries in Europe, such as Germany, and less Moscow-friendly ones, like Poland. By juxtaposing the positives of gas trade between Russia and Western Europe with the view that US sanctions on Nord Stream 2 are trying to force more

expensive American gas on the Europeans, these two narratives seem to drive a wedge between European countries along similar lines. In other words, although no mentions of Russia as an ‘energy superpower’ (see e.g. Rutland 2008) are identified in this research, Russian officials’ more geopolitically-oriented framings of Nord Stream 2 do strongly hint towards Russia trying to use its ‘energy weapon’ by driving a wedge between more and less ‘friendly’ countries in Europe.

When it comes to economic framings of Nord Stream 2, expectations from the literature revolve largely around the fact that Gazprom (and Russia as a whole) have been argued to pay more attention to the competitiveness of Russian gas on the European market, in order to retain market share in a time of rising supplies of LNG to Europe (e.g. Boussena and Locatelli 2017; Eser et al. 2019: 829; Abbas and Locatelli 2020: 436). Based on this, the representation of Nord Stream 2 can be expected to focus on EU-Russian gas relations as an economic win-win situation (e.g. Kuteleva 2020: 86). This expectation of the literature can most clearly be seen in the ‘Russian Competitiveness’ narrative, in which officials claim that Russia is ready to compete on the increasingly competitive European gas market. Considering the officials claim Russian natural gas is much cheaper than its main alternative – LNG – this framing represents Russia-EU gas trade as a good deal for both sides. In addition to this, the ‘Economic Sense of Nord Stream 2’ framing emphasizes a different element of Russian competition on the European market: the willingness of Gazprom and the Russian government to invest in new transport routes of Russian gas. According to this framing, due to shorter distance between the gas fields in Western Siberia and the European consumer, as well as more modern technology used, Nord Stream 2 can cut costs of gas transportation, as well as increase reliability of deliveries. As such, these two framings of Nord Stream 2 are in line with the broader tendency of Russian gas officials to become increasingly competitive on the European gas market, as identified by the more market-based literature.

However, this is not the only Russian economic framing of Nord Stream 2. More prominent is the narrative which posits Nord Stream 2 as the answer to other changes on the European gas market: the declining domestic production in countries like the Netherlands, combined with expected increased demand for gas as European countries move away from more polluting sources of energy like coal. This simple narrative of supply and demand is used to reinforce the idea that Nord Stream 2 would be a purely

commercial project (e.g. Putin, October 3, 2018). This same idea can also be seen in the ‘Western Business Participation’ framing, in which officials emphasize Nord Stream 2’s commercial nature by stressing that the initiative from the project came from Western European energy companies. In other words, Russian official rhetoric on Nord Stream 2 also pays significant attention to other factors on the European gas market than just competition, namely (expected) patterns of supply and demand for gas.

In short, in the case of Nord Stream 2, the official rhetoric reflects both the more geopolitically-oriented and market-based approaches from the literature, as well as framings not found as strongly in the literature. As we have seen, more geopolitical statements lambasting Nord Stream 2’s opponents and praising Russia’s relations with its proponents exist side by side with much market-focused framings centered around how Nord Stream 2 underlines the (price) competitiveness of Russian gas, and is a purely economic response to (expected) supply and demand patterns in Europe. As such, in the case of Nord Stream 2, various types of geopolitically and economically-oriented narratives exist side by side in Russian official rhetoric on the pipeline.

### Power of Siberia

Although the Russian official rhetoric on the Power of Siberia pipeline does feature both geopolitical and economic framings, in this case, there is a clear tendency towards justifying the construction of this pipeline using economic arguments. Although this clear predominance of economic framings could, in itself, be taken to imply that the more market-based literature would be more valuable in this case, this section reflects on how this research contributes to analyses of this pipeline – as part of Russia’s ‘Pivot to the East’ – from both main vantage points from the literature.

Firstly, a striking result from the data analyzed in this research is that the Russian official rhetoric on the Power of Siberia particularly emphasizes the bilateral relations between Russia and China, both in the geopolitical sense of this pipeline contributing to a deeper strategic ‘alliance’ as well as in the more economic terms of (gas) trade relations. While this might not be entirely surprising given the Power of Siberia is a pipeline running from Russia to China, it is striking to note that bilateral considerations with China seem to outweigh the broader strategic objective of ‘Pivoting’ to the East.

Contrary to Shagina's (2020: 458) claims that Russia's 'Pivot' has also included overtures to countries like Japan, India, and Vietnam (including in terms of energy relations), developing energy relations with other Asian countries than China does not seem to be much of a priority. This can also be seen in the 'Chinese/Asian market' framing: although the Asia-Pacific region as a whole is represented as a growing gas market, and sporadic mentions of plans such as extending the Power of Siberia pipeline to India (Novak, December 22, 2014), the clear focus lies on the (expected) growth of the Chinese gas market. However, what is striking about the rhetoric on this Russo-Chinese 'alliance' is that it is not represented as an 'anti-Western' alliance per se. This runs counter to the more geopolitically-oriented arguments discussed in the literature review, which tend to interpret the Power of Siberia as a Russian move away from its traditional ties with Europe (see e.g. Klein and Westphal 2016: 4; Proedrou 2018b: 82; Skalamera 2018: 69-70). Aside from mentions of a Russo-Chinese energy alliance potentially having an impact on the world economy (e.g. Putin, September 1, 2015), or that the cooperation between Russia and China should be an example for the rest of the world (Miller, May 16, 2017), the rhetoric on Russian-Chinese energy relations is not aimed against Western countries, but rather seems to be focused on increasing bilateral (gas) trade turnover (e.g. Putin, December 2, 2019). The only narrative which ties the Power of Siberia to Russia's gas relations with countries to its west is the 'Nationwide Gas Grid', which focuses on the opportunity this provides in terms of being able to export the same Russian gas to Europe and China and thus, potentially, let these two sides 'compete' for Russia's gas. In other words, it does not necessarily feature a desire to 'diversify' away from the European gas market. As such, the Russian official rhetoric paints a different picture than might be expected based on the literature here, with improving bilateral relations with China seemingly taking precedence over both relations with other Asian countries, as well as Russian officials' animosity towards the West.

In terms of the more economic approaches to the Power of Siberia pipeline discussed in the literature review, one of the arguments seen in the literature is that Russia would be trying to develop its Far Eastern region – by means of projects like this pipeline – as a 'springboard' for increased economic relations with countries in the Asia-Pacific (e.g. Mankoff 2015: 72-73; Blakkisrud 2018: 14-15). While the economic development of the Far Eastern regions the pipeline passes through is the most frequently used



economic framing identified in this research, this economic development seems to focus on the development of these regions in and of itself. Although, as we have seen, the development of the Sakha Republic and Amur Oblast' is also represented as providing benefits for the Russian economy as a whole, development of these regions is represented as an end in itself, rather than a means to the end of increasing economic ties with the Asia-Pacific. This focus on the development of these regions as a goal in itself can also be seen in the 'Gazifikatsiya' framing of the Power of Siberia, which focuses on the potential of the pipeline to connect remote towns and villages in the Far East to the gas grid, increasing living standards. While this focus on the growth of the economy and of living standards in this region itself might partially be ascribed to the inclusion of the MDRFE as a source of data in this research, we have seen that the narratives of 'Far East Development' and – especially – 'Gazifikatsiya' are also used by other Russian officials, as well as by Gazprom. In other words, the rhetoric studied discusses the development of Russia's Far Eastern regions as a goal in and of itself, rather than a 'springboard' to developing relations with countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

As such, this research on Russian official rhetoric adds nuances to both the more geopolitical and the more economic vantage points through which this pipeline has been discussed in the literature. In terms of Russia's 'Pivot to the East', the rhetoric on this pipeline primarily refers to the pipeline in terms of improving bilateral relations between Russia and China, rather than Russia's 'Pivot' as a whole, or its deteriorating relations with the West. In terms of the economic development of the Russian Far East, the rhetoric considers the economic development and improving standards of living in this region – facilitated among others by this pipeline project – as a goal in and of itself, rather than as part of Russia's 'Pivot to the East' more broadly.

## Reflection

In short, this study of Russian official rhetoric on these two gas pipelines has revealed a combination of geopolitical and economic framings of both projects, some more in line with existing literature on Russian foreign gas policy than others. This goes to show that, in studying Russia's foreign gas policy in these cases, the broad theoretical schools which look at international energy relations in either 'geopolitical' or 'economic' are

not likely to be appropriate as an analytical framework. This comprehensive analysis of Russian official rhetoric on two major pipelines suggests, rather, that these two approaches to international energy politics can – and do – more or less simultaneously have an influence on Russian energy policy-makers. Furthermore, the difference in (frequency of) geopolitical and economic framings between the two case studies of this thesis shows that context is also of great importance in studying international energy policy. Studies on international energy policy should not only a broader context of the domestic politics of a given country, the necessity of which has already been argued (e.g. Stoddard 2013; Wilson 2019; Goldthau and Sitter 2020), but also the context of a specific project such as a pipeline.

Naturally, studying the Nord Stream 2 and Power of Siberia pipelines in terms of Russian official rhetoric, as this thesis does, comes with its limitations. For instance, it is quite unlikely that rhetoric of the Russian government fully reflects the actual Russian gas policy, serving rather to disguise the true motives that Gazprom and the Russian government may have with these pipelines. Nevertheless, in identifying the different geopolitical and economic framings on the pipelines that predominate in this official rhetoric, this research does contribute to the literature on Russian gas policy by showing that this rhetoric transcends the stringent divide between geopolitical and economic approaches to international energy relations.

Having discussed and reflected on the findings of the research presented in the chapters above, the next section continues to briefly conclude this thesis as a whole.

## Conclusion

This thesis formulates an answer to the question how the Nord Stream 2 and Power of Siberia pipeline have been represented in Russian official rhetoric in geopolitical and economic terms, by examining this rhetoric using qualitative content analysis. The research has found that Russian official rhetoric on these pipelines featured both geopolitical and economic elements, with the economic framings being at least as important as the geopolitical ones. This calls into question the focus on either geopolitics or economics in looking at Russian natural gas policy: an approach which takes both kinds of factors into account seems like a more fruitful way of looking at these pipelines, and Russian natural gas policy in general. Furthermore, the frequency with which geopolitical and economic framings were used varied strongly between the two pipelines. This finding suggests that it might not only be relevant to examine the general energy policy-making of specific countries, as critical scholars on international energy relations have already argued (e.g. Stoddard 2013; Wilson 2019), but also to examine the context of specific energy projects.

In the case of Nord Stream 2, this research has found that geopolitical and economic framings have been more or less in balance in Russian official rhetoric. The most noticeable geopolitical framings tended to either represent Ukraine as a threat to stable EU-Russian gas trade, or to praise proponents of the gas pipeline like Germany and criticize opponents like the US. The economic framings primarily showed a strong consideration of various developments in the EU gas market, such as increasing competition and changing patterns of demand and supply in Europe. In the case of the Power of Siberia, more economically-based framings were used more often than geopolitically-oriented ones. The most striking patterns identified here are that bilateral relations with China are given far more significance than the development of Russia's 'Pivot to the East' more broadly. Furthermore, there was a strong focus on the development of the regions in Far Eastern Russia through which this pipeline flows, but this was represented primarily as an end in itself, rather than as a means to develop stronger relations with the Asia-Pacific region. In short, these two cases have shown different patterns in terms of official rhetoric.

Although this study on official rhetoric might not reveal a full picture on Russian decision-making on these pipelines, this thesis does reveal some broader considerations the Russian government may have had in the context of these two pipelines. The findings of this thesis correspond with the idea that natural gas policy, including Russia's, is shaped simultaneously by economic and geopolitical considerations, meaning that focusing on one of these two reveals only part of the total picture of considerations that (might) go into policymaking on a certain energy project. Further research could take this idea beyond the study of rhetoric, and look into the interplay between geopolitical and economic factors in the broader process of Russian decision-making on other gas pipelines. Furthermore, examining geopolitical and economic factors in Russian decision-making on international projects in other energy resources – say, comparing pipelines to oil export policy – could prove a fruitful avenue of further investigation.

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# Appendix 1

## Empirical Data referenced in-text (by source)<sup>9</sup>

### Nord Stream 2

#### *Vladimir Putin (kremlin.ru)*

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<sup>9</sup> A full list of sources used as data for this thesis is accessible in the following Google Drive folder: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1uEMT4tttyeU3QCXEyIOTnMIYTLX6N3GY?usp=sharing>.



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