

Master Thesis

Author: **Veronika Sorokina**

Title: ***The Geopolitics of Gas transportation of contemporary Russia (Case Studies of Nord Stream and South Stream Pipeline Projects)***

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The master thesis of Mrs Veronika Sorokina deals (mainly) with the topic of gas transportation from Russia to Europe. The work has a reasonably clear methodology and an acceptable structure. However, in my opinion, there are also certain mistakes.

- 1) The text focuses on too many topics, research questions and goals. Goals, aims and the hypothesis are outlined in the Introduction:

As for the first part of her work, the author plans to answer many questions, such as “(...) *which principles an ideas have influenced the foreign and security policies of the Russian federation, what are supposed to be the state’s natural interests and security problems, how Russia sees itself in the world affairs and global energy supply, (...)*“ (p. 13) and actually a few more. Author’s **hypothesis (there are actually two of them) is the following:** “(...) *that the contemporary Russia understands the national power in its neo(realist) meaning (including sphere of energy sector) and that the state is going to exploit the link between energy resources possessions and its national security and foreign policy’s tasks in the future*“ (p. 13).

For her second part, the author sets further, interlinked goals: “(...) *to evaluate the reasonableness of the desire of the Russian authorities to use the dependency of other countries and /or regions from the Russian natural gas reserves for its strategy’s implementations*“ (p. 13). In order to **evaluate „the reasonableness“** of the current Russia’s political elite, the author decided to analyze the international gas markets, markets of the EU and the Russian Federation (p. 13) as well as natural gas market of Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan whose interests may collide with the Russian ones (p. 14); moreover, the author plans to investigate “(...) *complicated contemporary gas relationship between the Russian Federation and the European Union (...)*“ (p. 14).

The third part of the thesis plans to “(...) *examine how the Russian Federation is going to respond on the actual European fear to be dependent from natural gas disputes between Russia and transit-states and on the want of the EU to diversify natural gas supply resources and their routs*“ (p. 14). Case studies of the North Stream and South Stream pipeline projects are included as well as investigation of “(...) *declared and true geopolitics goals of the Russian Federation connected with the new pipelines construction*“ (p. 15). Further goals of the third chapter are mentioned.

- 2) The first chapter indicates that current international relations are guided by (neo)realism – which is actually disputable, however, the author presents it as a fact (p. 21). In addition to that, she relies on the fact that current Russian foreign policy is based on neorealism (p. 21). It may be tempting to claim that, however, neorealism provides inadequate guide for explaining the development of Russian foreign policy because its theoretical assumptions ignore many variables. A new Russian grand strategy, patriotism, anti-Westernism (till the very recent period) and the very nature

of the current Russian regime can hardly be analyzed using a pure neorealist approach.
What other theories/approaches should be included?

- 3) At many points, the author makes simplistic judgements and non-academic conclusions, for example: *“In order to conclude with the role, which Gazprom plays in the Russian foreign policy and how Russia is going to use it, a few Putin’s quotes would be enough”* (p. 38); *“It is absolutely clear, that the RF in its foreign policy acts according to the defensive realism principles”* (p. 26); *“I think that a sympathetic response by the RF’s officials and common citizens of Russia to the Polish air force crash near by Smolensk could significantly improve the relations between two states. A confirmation of this is a quote from a Polish newspaper (BBC News!): ‘Russia’s behavior (...) totally contradicts the thesis of those who claim that closer relations (...) are impossible.’”* (p. 56); *“Lastly, I would not agree with the mentioned above conclusion of the East European Analysis centre, which stated that Russia could easily manipulate Germany by blocking the Nord Stream route without any disturbances to other European states. Personally, I think that Russia would not risk worsening the relations with such a considerable and influential country (...)”* (p. 57).

To sum up, it must be stressed that the author worked with statistics, expert opinion etc. and she understands the situation in “gas geopolitics” to a great extent. Still, the whole text gives an impression of a long investigative journalist article more than an academic work. As an oponent, I would be interested in answers to the following questions:

- ***Is there a longer history of Italian-Russo closer cooperation in gas (energy) area or it started with the Berlusconi-Putin friendship?*** (see p. 59)
- ***What future does the author see for the Nabucco project?***

I suggest to evaluate the Thesis as “B-C” (Very good - Good), based on the oral defence.

Markéta Židková

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