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## **ENERGY DIPLOMACY IN RUSSIA–CHINA RELATIONS: A GEOPOLITICAL ANALYSIS OF MULTIPOLARITY**

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### **Introduction**

The energy dimension has assumed a priority position in Russia–China relations, especially against the backdrop of the shifting balance of global power. In Russia–China relations, energy relations have become more important since 2014 due to Russia's turn to Asia in the wake of sanctions and China's need for reliable energy resources. Korolev conceptualizes energy diplomacy, the first use of energy resources and infrastructure in foreign policy, as vital to both nations guaranteeing their sovereignty.<sup>1</sup>

### **Aim**

The paper focuses on those aspects of energy diplomacy that have been continuously influencing the formation of a multipolar international order between Russia and China.

### **Objectives**

- To establish the energy relations of Russia and China in the form of economic partnership and geopolitical balancing.
- To assess influence of the Western sanctions, construction of the Power of Siberia pipelines, and also cooperation within BRICS and the SCO.
- To assess asymmetry in the relational framework of the relationship and what it means for multipolarity.

### **Materials and Methods**

The study utilizes the frameworks of realism, liberalism, and constructivism to analyze the intertwining of Russia and China's energy diplomacy. The work covers materials for the period from 2014 to 2025, including the analytical materials of



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EUISS - 2024<sup>2</sup>, the International Energy Agency-IEA-2024<sup>3</sup>, academic works by Korolev 2020<sup>4</sup>, Henderson and Mitrova 2016<sup>5</sup>, and others.

### Hypothesis

While energy diplomacy does depict Russia and China as greater equals, and allows for the construction of a multipolar international order, the framework of their relationship is lopsided due to the imbalance of power, economically and politically, and the techno-economic imbalance China possesses.

### Results

From a realist perspective, Russia–China energy cooperation serves as a counterbalance to Western geopolitical influence, supporting a self-help strategy of mutual benefit.<sup>6</sup> Liberal institutionalism, however, emphasizes the role of interdependence, long-term contracts, and institutional cooperation through organizations such as BRICS and the SCO, which reduce conflict potential.<sup>7</sup> Constructivists suggest ideology is used to justify the partnership and to justify resisting the West.<sup>8</sup>

After the Ukraine 2014 Crisis and the imposition of Western sanctions, Russia was forced to more strategically “Turn to the East.” The Power of Siberia pipeline, inaugurated 2019, was the first tangible step to deepened energy interdependence. After 2022 sanctions escalated, China became Russia’s most important energy partner and negotiations for Power of Siberia 2 are expected to deliver 50 billion cubic meters of gas annually. Cooperating on sustainable energy and further

<sup>1</sup> Korolev, A. (2020). Russia’s Reorientation to Asia: Causes and Strategic Implications. *The Pacific Review*, 33(5), 665–691.

<sup>2</sup> European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS). (2024). China–Russia Relations: Strategic Symbiosis or Uneasy Partnership?

<sup>3</sup> International Energy Agency (IEA). (2024). *World Energy Outlook 2024*.

<sup>4</sup> Korolev, A. (2020). Russia’s Reorientation to Asia: Causes and Strategic Implications. *The Pacific Review*, 33(5), 665–691.

<sup>5</sup> Henderson, J., & Mitrova, T. (2016). Energy Relations between Russia and China: Playing Chess with the Dragon. Oxford Institute for Energy Studies.

<sup>6</sup> See footnote 4

<sup>7</sup> Overland, I. (2019). The Geopolitics of Renewable Energy: Debunking Four Emerging Myths. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 49, 36–40.

<sup>8</sup> Lukin, A. (2018). Russia–China Relations and the Changing Global Order. *Asia Policy*, 13(1), 65–91.



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defiance of sanctions integration was announced by members at the 2024 BRICS Summit in Kazan. EU Institute for Security Studies analysts have termed the relationship a “dependency gap”.<sup>9</sup>

### Conclusion

From both a pragmatic and symbolic perspective, Russia-China energy diplomacy illustrates a direct challenge to the Western-centric globe’s architecture. Even with the profound asymmetry, the order illustrates the potential of energy as a constituent of strategic power and a key building block.

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<sup>9</sup> European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS). (2024). China–Russia Relations: Strategic Symbiosis or Uneasy Partnership?