

REVIEWS

Thane Gustafson, *The Bridge: Natural Gas in a Redivided Europe*. Harvard University Press, 2020.

The issue of the use of energy as a weapon has been the subject of a long-standing and fierce debate. Depending on the perspective, different analysts arrive at different conclusions regarding the causal relationship between foreign policy and energy-related events. Thane Gustafson's *The Bridge: Natural Gas in a Redivided Europe* offers a compelling narrative from the commercial perspective. Whereas his previous book *Wheel of Fortune: The Battle for Oil and Power in Russia* (2012) looked at the development of Russia's oil industry, *The Bridge* unpacks the genesis of West-East gas relations. Using the bridge as a metaphor, Gustafson dissects the emergence of physical and political ties between the Soviet Union and Europe, arguing that a dense network of gas pipelines fostered normal political ties between the two.

Following a transnational approach, Gustafson's book joins previous studies in the objective to examine the history of West-East energy relations. Similar to Per Högselius' *Red Gas* (2012) and Jeronim Perović's *Cold War Energy: A Transnational History of Soviet Oil and Gas* (2016), Gustafson's *The Bridge* gathers empirical evidence from both Western and Soviet/Russian perspectives to meticulously examine the evolution of their energy interdependency. Thoroughly researched and eloquently written, the book tracks the economic and political drivers of gas trade, with the emphasis on the former. *The Bridge* focuses on the structural changes in the commercial sphere that took place both in the West and East and examines how they created path dependencies—through infrastructural legacies and institutional trade arrangements—and still shape the EU-Russia energy relations.

With the fall of the Soviet Union, fundamental changes within the EU and Russia transformed the role of gas in their relations. A number of newly independent states like Ukraine and Belarus acquired control over the transit and transport system no longer under Moscow's purview. Preoccupied with the

establishment of a post-Soviet gas order, Russian leaders underestimated the importance of EU institutions in driving radical transformations on the European gas market and kept engagement on a bilateral basis. Once considered as a factor of stability, gas became a subject of strife and sowed divisions. As Gustafson argues, “Unlike the situation in the Cold War, when the gas bridge served as a stabilizing and confidence-building function based on mutual economic interest and long acquaintance, today’s gas relationships, despite the gas trade’s present prosperity, are vulnerable to growing East-West tensions” (p. 405).

While many studies focus on the Cold War period, Gustafson’s book delves into the recent chapters of the EU market regulations and the domestic developments in post-Soviet Russia. It shows how the EU’s regulatory powers curtailed Gazprom’s dominant position on the European gas market. The book provides an in-depth analysis of the gas market developments in Ukraine—often a missing part in the larger picture of the West-East energy relations. It discusses the latest structural reforms that Kyiv undertook to adapt to the tumultuous relations with Russia after 2014 and how Ukraine seeks to diminish its energy vulnerability.

The Bridge paints a bleak outlook for gas in Europe. With the strong trends of decarbonization, Russia’s search for new markets will only intensify. Domestically, Gazprom will face fiercer competition from LNG exporters like Novatek which has already undercut the state-owned monopoly’s dominance in the West. Technological innovations and changes in the market structure will leave piped gas companies “with less and less leverage compared to the past” (p. 408).

The main critical points stem from the discussion on energy as a foreign policy tool. Firstly, Gustafson argues that although Gazprom “may be an instrument of government policy and even of geopolitical ambitions, [...] it is also interested in profit and market share”. He seeks to demystify Gazprom as a “highly centralised, unitary actor” and to prove that the company is driven by a commercial logic, able to adapt to legal and market pressure. In reality, a geo-economic approach would be better suited to describe such state-owned giants as Gazprom. The drivers behind Gazprom’s activities

are often a mix of economic and political motives that are hard to disentangle. Ambitious pipeline projects such as Nord Stream 2 and Power of Siberia aim to bring cheap gas to Germany and China, while at the same seeking to circumvent Ukraine and to diversify from the European market. Revealing its geopolitical motives, Gazprom continues the Soviet practices of supplying delinquent customers and subsidizing gas prices to politically loyal neighbors. While Gazprom's energy projects are not without economic fundamentals, lavish state subsidies and rent-seeking practices are part of Gazprom's commercial modus operandi. The main question that remains unanswered is what leeway Gazprom has for commercial adaptation. In other words, what limitations does Putin's political system place on Gazprom's room for adaptation? While Gazprom has certainly reacted to external pressures and complied, some changes like unbundling would be unfeasible in the current political system.

Secondly, characteristically for Gustafson's writing style, he spends a lot of time portraying the background of the people-in-charge. Arguing that gas is "a relationship commodity," he places a particular emphasis on the "strong personalities" that shaped decision-making processes in the West and East, for example, the EU Commissioners who spearhead the liberalization of the EU gas industry, or Alexey Miller, Gazprom's CEO. While the detailed description of the decision-makers' background provides thoughtful insights, a further link between the personalities of decision-makers and the political system would be a welcome discussion. Political culture and institutional legacy matter when it comes to the types of "strong personalities" the system requires. In Russia, this means a preference for those displaying discretion and reliable loyalty.

Thirdly, *The Bridge* uses a narrow definition of "energy weapon," equating it to the classical blackmail of supply disruptions. Analyzing the Russian-Ukrainian gas disputes in 2006 and 2008–2009, Gustafson argues that "whenever Russia has really sought to influence Ukrainian politics or policy, it has for the most part not used gas as a weapon" (p. 350). A more encompassing definition of "energy weapon" would better serve to capture the full range of instruments that Russia has deployed to leverage their energy-dependent neighbors, including gas debts and the control of transit.

Broadening the interpretation of what may constitute an “energy weapon” may help to incorporate other, more subtle, strategies that Russia has used both in the West and East, involving the manipulation of flows, prices, and discourses (cf. Högselius 2020).

The book is recommended for everyone interested in the Russian gas sector and the history of East–West energy relations.

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Maria A. Rogacheva, *Soviet Scientists Remember: Oral Histories of the Cold War Generation*. Lexington Books, 2020.

This study is devoted to the interesting but under-studied topic of the life of the elite in the USSR. Actually, oral histories about Soviet times are currently quite popular in many social sciences such as history, sociology, anthropology, and so on. One of the main reasons for this is the fact that people who not only remember this time clearly but worked for the Soviet state are now in their seventies. And scientists are very interested in preserving firsthand information about the country which disappeared almost thirty years ago.

The author gathered information from a quite close and small social and professional group—scientists from the “scientific town” of Chernogolovka, near Moscow. So-called scientific towns were located next to the main scientific cities (such as Moscow, Novosibirsk, Dnipropetrovsk) or near their research sites (such as Nauchnoe in the Crimea, and the so-called “scientific towns” in the Caucasus, Siberian, and Central Asian regions).

Maria Rogacheva’s interviewees are six persons who worked in Chernogolovka almost all their life as state employees in physical and chemical research laboratories. On the one hand, all the stories are of a common character, covering topics such as wartime childhood, studying in an institute (university), reactions to Stalin’s death and Khrushchev’s Secret Speech, how they ended up in