

Pragmatism and Ideology in Russian-German Energy Relations

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Abstract. For a long time, cooperation between Russia and Germany in the energy sector was based on bilateral interests and economic pragmatism, but recently in its relations with Russia the Federal Republic of Germany has been demonstrating ideologisation and loss of sovereignty in the important sphere of energy supply. This article investigated the history of bilateral energy relations, their characteristics, the political consequences of their disruption, and the results of the German energy policy. The results of the study include quantitative data on the volume of energy co-operation between the two states in the energy sector, as well as the status and dynamics of the German energy sector over the last 30 years. The main conclusions of the study are: 1) the thesis of Germany's declining opportunities on the world stage because of its shrinking economic power has been proved. 2) The assumption of the importance of low-cost energy supplies from Russia for Germany has been confirmed. 3) The vulnerability of the German political system to external influence through destructive political forces has been revealed. The final conclusion was that ideology has taken priority over pragmatism in German energy and foreign policy towards Russia in recent years.

Keywords: energy policy, energy supply foreign policy, Germany, ideology, pragmatism, Russia

For citation: Sugonyaev P.M. Pragmatism and Ideology in Russian-German Energy Relations. *Russia & World: Scientific Dialogue*. 2024; 3(13): 47-60, [doi.org/10.53658/RW2024-4-3\(13\)-47-60](https://doi.org/10.53658/RW2024-4-3(13)-47-60)

Introduction

The mutually beneficial German-Russian energy partnership, which had been built over the past fifty years, was suspended with the start of a special military operation by Russia. Later, during the still undisclosed destruction of one of the branches of the Nord Stream project in September 2022, cooperation was seriously complicated due to damage to the gas pipeline infrastructure. At the same time, the possibility of supplying energy resources from Russia to Germany still remains. Our country demonstrates its interest in energy partnership. At the same time, Germany, one of the main beneficiaries of cooperation, voluntarily refuses Russian energy resources, which causes considerable economic damage to it. In Berlin, there is still a surprising political unanimity on this issue, while Germany is actively developing the concept of energy transition in parallel with the rejection of nuclear and coal energy. In this regard, the question arises: how pragmatic or still ideological was the step of the German authorities to curtail bilateral energy cooperation.

Materials and Methods

The materials of the study were official statistical data on the export and import of energy resources of Russia and Germany, respectively, research materials of experts and "think tanks" on this topic, data of foreign and Russian mass media.

During the preparation of the article, dissertation studies [5, 7, etc.], materials of publications in scientific journals [1-2, 4, 6, 9], scientific materials in foreign languages [10-12] and scientific literature [3, 8] were analyzed.

The scientific methods used in the article were the method of statistical analysis, the method of document analysis, the method of synthesis and classification in the course of preparing information tables on the topic. The comparison method was used in the course of comparing data on the energy sector of Germany in 1990 and 2022, the deduction method was applied to identify the vulnerabilities of the political system of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Results

Successful bilateral energy cooperation between Russia and Germany was curtailed by the German side under pressure from external forces and contrary to its own national interests. This step had a direct impact on Germany's opportunities in the world, since its political weight on the world stage is determined by the economy.



The beginning of a successful cooperation

Energy cooperation between states means trade in electricity or the main types of fossil fuels, such as hard or brown coal, oil, natural gas or nuclear fuel, between an energy-rich exporting state and an energy-poor importing state. The history of economic relations between Russia and Germany goes back centuries. At the same time, the starting point in the history of the energy partnership between the parties can be easily found: at the height of the Cold War, after a change in the ruling coalition, and also due to economic necessity, Germany began to establish relations with the states of the socialist camp in the form of the “New Eastern Policy” proclaimed by the Social Democratic Chancellor Willy Brandt (1969-1974). The “gas-pipelines” deal and the Moscow Treaty of 1970¹ provided a solid foundation for mutual partnership. In the 1970s, new deals were being concluded, and the volume of pipes and natural gas in exchange for them was increasing, despite active US attempts to prevent this [6:18-19]. Under Brandt, the share of Soviet gas rose to 5% of Germany’s total natural gas imports [8:125–127].

During the reign of the next Chancellor, Helmut Schmidt (1974–1982), the share of Soviet gas was already close to 40%. Helmut Kohl (1982–1998) increased the share to half in the late 1980s, and under him the percentage of Soviet gas did not fall below 40%. Under the government of Gerhard Schröder (1998–2005), approximately the same dynamics were maintained – from 40 to 45% of gas imports. Under Angela Merkel (2005–2021), gas supplies from Russia to Germany reached their maximum level and exceeded the 55% mark [2:206–423]. According to Gazprom, the dynamics of gas supplies to Europe over 40 years (from 1973 to 2013) demonstrated an increase from 1.1 billion m³ to 40.2 billion m³², which shows an increase of 3646%. With the growing problems caused by increasing dependence on transit countries, Russia and Germany carried out a large-scale project to build Nord Stream 1 in 2005–2012 [7:20], which directly connected them and caused a flurry of criticism against Germany from its European partners. The matter was not limited to the flows alone – both at the interstate and private company levels, joint work in the gas sector continued actively [12:13–14]. In 2007, Germany was second after the entire CIS among buyers of Russian natural gas, and in 2021, it was already in first place [3:243–261]. Accordingly, the importance of mutual cooperation has increased significantly over this period of time.

In 2019, the share of gas from Russia amounted to 50.7% of all gas imports³. In 2020, the share remained high, the following year it was at 55% and falls in 2022 to 20% against the backdrop of the Ukrainian conflict⁴. Other data show that the increase in Russia’s “blue

1 On the Moscow Treaty between the USSR and the FRG. Historical and Documentary Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Available from:

2 40 years on the German market. Gazprom. 2013. Available from: <https://www.gazprom.ru/about/history/events/germany40/>.

3 Afanasyeva M. History and prospects of energy deals between Russia and Germany against the background of US sanctions and green energy policy. Available from: https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/columns/europeanpolicy/istoriya-i-perspektivy-energeticheskikh-sdelok-mezhdu-rossiye-i-germaniyey-na-fone-sanktsiy-ssha-i-ze/?sphrase_id=96231381.

4 Germany cuts Russian share in gas use by more than half in 2022. Bloomberg. 2022. Available from: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-12-20/germany-cuts-russian-share-in-gas-use-by-more-than-half-in-2022>.

fuel” exports increased slightly from 1992 to 2021 (by 13 billion m³). In 2022, supplies fell by almost 60 billion m³. Further developments in 2023 and 2024 show a gradual decrease in Russian gas imports to zero from September 2022⁵ (as shown in Table 1). The data provided show the actual absence of physical supplies of natural gas from Russia or transit countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic or Austria, and at the same time the replacement of volumes with gas from Norway and the Netherlands in 2023 and 2024.⁶

Table 1. The share of Russian gas in German imports under different governments

Federal Government	Share of Russian gas in German imports
W.Brandt (1969–1974)	5%
G.Schmidt (1974–1982)	40%
G.Kohl (1982–1998)	50%
G.Schröder (1998–2005)	45%
A.Merkel (2005–2021)	55%
O.Scholz (since 2021)	0%

It turns out that the Social Democrat Olaf Scholz (Chancellor of Germany since 2021) and the government of the “traffic light” coalition, in which the Green Party and the Free Party of Germany play an important role, have drastically reduced the import of Russian gas into the country, citing this primarily as an escalation in the Ukrainian conflict. German media happily wrote about the replacement of Russian gas supplies with Norwegian gas⁷. German experts began to criticize gas cooperation with Russia. The reason for the criticism was the ignoring of geopolitical risks (too high dependence on supplies from Russia), as well as the emergence of problems with European structures, and at the same time as the energy transition, the rejection of nuclear energy, attempts are being made to justify the shortcomings of cooperation with Russia by high gas prices for German industry [11:373–393]. Other experts predicted the consequences of a possible halt in energy imports from Russia (a risk for the German economy as a consequence of Germany’s high dependence on Russian supplies), while the main problems would arise with gas supplies. The German economy was advised to prepare in this case for savings and a gradual replacement of fossil fuels with renewable energy sources. In order to reduce dependence on energy imports, Germany needs to maintain high prices for fossil fuels for as long as possible in order to create more incentives for their replacement with renewable energy sources [10:14].

In the oil sector, cooperation between Russia and Germany has also been actively

5 Import volume of natural gas from Russia in Germany from June 2021 to June 2023. Statista. 2023. Available from: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1332783/german-gas-imports-from-russia/>.

6 Erdgasdaten aktuell. BDEW Bundesverband der Energie- und Wasserwirtschaft. 2023. Available from: <https://www.bdew.de/energie/aktuelle-entwicklungen-zu-erdgasdaten/>.

7 Deutschland kompensiert russische Gaslücke. Zeit Online. 2023. Available from: <https://www.zeit.de/wirtschaft/2023-03/deutschland-erdgas-versorgung-russland-kompensiert-netzagentur>.

developing. In general, from 1992 to 2021, exports of oil and oil products from Russia have grown almost threefold. In 2000, Germany was in fourth place among importers of Russian oil, and from 2016 to 2021, it was consistently in third place after China and the Netherlands [3:354–355]. Just as in the situation with gas, the partnership between the two countries has been growing, and the network of oil pipelines has been actively developing. Thus, since the 1960s, the Druzhba oil pipeline was built through the territory of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and the GDR, as well as the Baltic Pipeline System (BPS-1 in 2001 and BPS-2 in 2006), which bypassed transit countries from among the post-Soviet countries and former allies in the socialist camp.⁸

Although from 1950 to 1985 the main suppliers of oil to the German market remained the states of the Middle East and Africa, Russia managed to overtake them in terms of supply volumes due to the unstable political situation in the region⁹. As a result, Russia has managed to become the largest supplier of “black gold” to Germany since 2008, twice surpassing the UK, which is in second place among the main suppliers of oil to Germany. Since 2019, Germany has begun to hide data on oil supplies¹⁰, they were published again in connection with Germany’s policy of refusing all energy resources from Russia, primarily gas and oil (shown in Table 2). At the beginning of 2022, the main buyers of Russian oil were the United States and European countries (including Germany), which used an extensive system of oil pipelines and contacts developed over the years. However, by the beginning of 2023, there were noticeably fewer European buyers of Russian oil than Asian and African ones. Of particular interest is the fact that Europe began to purchase huge quantities of oil products from countries such as Brazil and India, which, in turn, seriously increased their oil imports from Russia¹¹.

German statistics show that various federal states imported oil from Russia until October 2022 and coal until February 2024.¹² According to German data, the extremely high share of Russian oil products remains (34% in 2021 and 25% in 2022) and Russia’s share in oil imports will decrease to zero in 2023. The Russian share in imports was shared primarily by Norway, the US and the UK, the share of imported diesel also decreased to 5% in 2023 (a

8 Pechishcheva L. Russian-German ‘gas’ and ‘oil’ relations. Available from: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/columns/europeanpolicy/rossiysko-germanskiegazovye-i-neftyanye-otnosheniya/>.

9 Energy resources in Germany. Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources. Available from: https://www.bgr.bund.de/EN/Themen/Energie/Downloads/Energierohstoffe_2009_Teil3_en.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=2.

10 Afanasyeva M. History and prospects of energy deals between Russia and Germany against the background of US sanctions and green energy policy. Available from: https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/columns/europeanpolicy/istoriya-i-perspektivy-energeticheskikh-sdelok-mezhdu-rossiyei-i-germaniei-na-fone-sanktsiy-ssha-i-ze/?sphrase_id=96231381.

11 Export of petroleum products from Russia. TADVISER. 2023. Available from: https://www.tadviser.ru/index.php/%D0%A1%D1%82%D0%B0%D1%82%D1%8C%D1%8F:%D0%AD%D0%BA%D1%81%D0%BF%D0%BE%D1%80%D1%82_%D0%BD%D0%B5%D1%84%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B4%D1%83%D0%BA%D1%82%D0%BE%D0%B2_%D0%B8%D0%B7_%D0%A0%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%81%D0%B8%D0%B8.

12 Exports and imports (foreign trade): Länder, months, countries, classifications of trading goods. DeStatis. 2024. Available from: <https://www.genesis.destatis.de/genesis/online?operation=abrufabelleBearbeiten&levelindex=1&levelid=1714814795721&auswahloperation=abrufabelleAuspruefungAuswaehlen&auswahlverzeichnis=ordnungsstruktur&auswahlziel=werteabruf&code=51000-0037&auswahltext=&wertauswahl=253&wertauswahl=257&wertauswahl=254&nummer=10&variable=10&name=GP19B2#astructure>.

reduction of 85%)¹³. In addition, Western countries have jointly set a price ceiling on Russian oil, which has led to a decrease in Russian oil exports to Europe and an increase in oil prices on the continent. However, the lack of a sensible control mechanism and the nature of market relations will leave no chance for a price ceiling in the long term [9:540-541].

Table 2. Oil imports from Germany, the main supply region

Decade	Main region of German oil imports
1950s	Middle East
1960s	Middle East
1970s	Africa
1980s	USSR
1990s	Western Europe
2000s	Russia
2010s	Russia
2020–2024	Western Europe and the USA

There was practically no cooperation between the two countries in the nuclear field, because Russia and Germany use different types of reactors designed for different types of fuel (Germany promptly closed all Soviet-type nuclear power plants on its territory), respectively, Germany until recently cooperated with other actors in this field.

Energy cooperation in the coal sector between Russia and Germany began in the post-Soviet period of Russian history. Coal exports in the country have grown significantly since 1992, almost 6 times, brown coal - almost 30 times with maximum deliveries in 2022 and 2021, Germany was also a buyer of Russian raw materials. The share of Germany in total Russian exports has increased significantly since 2009, the country was in eighth place among buyers of Russian coal in 2021 [3:259–261]. However, due to the beginning of the NWO, Germany decided to cut ties with Russia in this area as well. The share of hard coal from the Russian Federation in 2021 remained consistently high and significantly exceeded the total supplies from other countries due to the geographical factor and the established cooperation scheme. Until July 2022, the Russian share was more than 50%, and in September 2023 it was already almost zero¹⁴. However, thanks to the momentum gained and the need for time to find new suppliers and reorient towards them, Russia remained the largest supplier of coal to the domestic market of Germany in 2022.¹⁵

13 Mineralöldaten 2023. Arbeitsgemeinschaft Energiebilanzen. 2023. Available from: <https://ag-energiebilanzen.de/daten-und-fakten/zusatzinformationen/>.

14 PEV-Schätzung Steinkohle im 1. bis 4. Quartal 2023. Schätzung der EEFA-Forschungsinstituts. Steinkohlendaten 2023. Available from: <https://ag-energiebilanzen.de/daten-und-fakten/zusatzinformationen/>.

15 Russia was the largest supplier of coal to Germany in 2022, the media reports. RIA Novosti. 25.02.2023. Available from: <https://ria.ru/20230225/ugol-1854265467.html>.

Thus, the events of 2022, according to some German officials about the formal end of the era of Russian-German cooperation, became a decisive blow to bilateral relations. The beginning was laid by the sanctions regime of 2014, although there is an opposite opinion about the finality of the break, G. Schroeder, who is confident in the resumption of future energy cooperation [2:182]. The same picture is observed in all three areas: Germany, due to ideology and solidarity, completely breaks off the special energy relations with Russia that have lasted for decades, based on an already existing infrastructure. In return, the Germans overpay for the supply of all fossil resources and are forced to build new supply chains in a crisis situation. Obviously, such a step is contrary to Germany's interests in further economic development, which has traditionally been built on profitable supplies of resources and energy carriers.

Political consequences of the end of energy cooperation with Russia

The consequences of the breakdown in energy relations between Russia and Germany have hit both sides hard. First, even despite the predictions of German experts, cooperation with Russia meant an era of cheap energy for Germany. After the end of dependence on energy resources from Russia, Germany became dependent on other energy exporters, primarily the United States, which is not only a seller of expensive liquefied natural gas, subject to serious seasonal price fluctuations, but also a direct competitor of Germany¹⁶.

Moreover, Germany, having sacrificed pragmatism and good established relations with Russia, found itself in a new geopolitical reality, where it participates with limited sovereignty in the confrontation between Washington and its competitors in the form of Russia at present and China in the future. At the same time, Germany itself declared Russia to be the greatest threat to peace and security in the Euro-Atlantic area in its National Security Strategy and accused Russia of undermining Germany's security through energy cooperation [1:74]. In addition, the energy crisis also affected domestic policy, since the ideology of abandoning fossil fuels was ultimately revised in an attempt to curb rising energy prices, which caused conflicts within the Green Party, the main lobbyist for the green course and energy transition. Disagreements arose within the party between realists and supporters of traditional environmental values. The further growth of government spending (energy crisis and economic downturn) and the state's attempts to reduce support measures for the population have led to an increase in protest activity and the mobilization of supporters of non-systemic parties, such as the Alternative for Germany. All this indicates a further complication of the socio-economic situation in the country, a gradual loss of sovereignty, and a departure from national interests [6:305-310]. This situation will have domestic and foreign policy consequences.

¹⁶ Deutsche Unternehmen mit Rekordinvestitionen in den USA – „Wir fallen derzeit zurück“. Merkur. 2024. Available from: <https://www.merkur.de/wirtschaft/deutsche-unternehmen-mit-rekordinvestitionen-in-den-usa-inflation-reduction-act-zr-92849203.html>.

The results of German energy policy (shown in Table 1)

To assess the importance of Germany's cooperation with Russia in the energy sector, as well as to assess the political consequences of abandoning the partnership with Russia, it is necessary to compare the state of the German energy sector in 1990 and 2022.¹⁷ Below, the data is collected and grouped in a table compiled by the author.

Table 3. German energy dynamics, from 1990 to 2022

Indicator	1990	2022	Dynamics
Total energy consumption, Mt oil equivalent	352	270	-23,3%
Own energy production, Mt oil equivalent	187	96	-48,7%
Energy intensity, t of conventional fuel/unit of GDP	0,130	0,065	-50,0%
Electricity production, TWh	550	578	+5,0%
Coal production, million t	434	131	-69,8%
Coal consumption, million t	449	168	-62,6%
Oil production, million t	5	3	-40,0%
Oil product production, million t	106	98	-7,5%
Oil product consumption, million t	119	92	-22,7%
Natural gas production, billion m3	19	5	-73,7%
Natural gas consumption, billion m3	70	83	+18,6%
Share of renewable energy sources in the energy balance, %	3,9	44,4	+40,5
Share of solar and wind power plants in the energy balance, %	0	32,5	+32,5
Carbon emissions, million tons	964	636	-34,0%
Electricity production at nuclear power plants, TWh	144,6	6,8	-95,3%

Total energy consumption from 1990 to 2022 fell by almost a quarter, and domestic production fell by almost half. To compensate for this decline, the energy intensity of the economy fell significantly - almost by half, with electricity production growing by only 5% over 20 years. Following the reduction in energy consumption, coal production and consumption fell significantly (by 70 and 60%, respectively), oil production, and the production and consumption of petroleum products (Germany's own meager oil production fell slightly, as did the production of petroleum products; petroleum product consumption fell by 20%). Domestic gas production fell by almost three-quarters, although also insignificant in volume. Gas consumption, in turn, grew by almost 20%.

¹⁷ Enerdata. World Energy and Climate Data. 2023. Available from: <https://energystats.enerdata.net/>.

AG Energiebilanzen. 2023. Available from: https://ag-energiebilanzen.de/daten-und-fakten/bilanzen-1990-bis-2030/?wpv-jahresbereich-bilanz=1990-2000&wpv_aux_current_post_id=45&wpv_aux_parent_post_id=45&wpv_view_count=2753-CATRe4257049c177cf191052746afc46d0a3.

Nuclear power generation experienced a real collapse due to the closure of the last nuclear power plant in April 2023.¹⁸, 20 times (in 2024, no nuclear energy will be produced in Germany at all). At the same time, one cannot fail to note the significant growth of renewable energy to 40%, and wind and solar generation to 32.5% in the country's energy balance and a reduction in carbon emissions by almost a third (which, however, is also associated with the closure of many industries and power plants in the territory of the former GDR).

Discussion

Thus, even despite the reduction in consumption of coal, oil and nuclear energy, energy efficiency and the share of generation from renewable energy sources have increased, and carbon emissions have decreased. Against this background, the indicator of consumption of natural gas stands out, of which Russia has long been a proven exporter. In general, the state and dynamics of the German energy sector over the past thirty years allow us to conclude that the economy has developed insignificantly, which reflects Germany's political weight on the world stage. Germany's attempts to increase its energy security by relying on renewable energy sources, on the one hand, help to become less dependent on supplies from abroad, but on the other hand, they pose a number of new and still unresolved problems for the energy system [4:98-106]; in addition, the state is becoming dependent on suppliers of equipment for solar and wind generation. Dependence reaches a new level, and the energy system becomes even more fragile, which threatens economic development and, accordingly, the positioning of Germany on the world stage. At the same time, the need for energy resources does not disappear, and the search for new partners along with the establishment of new supply routes leads to an additional increase in the cost of energy resources and electricity in the country. In addition, greater dependence on Euro-Atlantic partners will lead to an even greater renunciation of sovereignty and its own interests, which will make Germany only an instrument of the policies of other actors.

Conclusions

In the recent past, the volume of bilateral energy cooperation between Russia and Germany was impressive, which met the interests of both parties: Germany needed cheap energy resources and a large market, Russia needed technology and high-tech industrial goods. However, since 2014, the German authorities have chosen the path of open competition with Russia through sanctions. The German political system once again proclaimed its loyalty to the Euro-Atlantic path and its lack of alternatives; politicians who

¹⁸ Die letzten Atommeiler sind abgeschaltet. Tagesschau. 2023. Available from: <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/atomkraftwerke-stilllegung-105.html>.

were skeptical about energy cooperation with Russia and promoted expensive ideas of "green" energy were able to come to power.

In fact, the German political class, through its own efforts, destroyed the profitable energy partnership with Russia, opposed common sense and economic pragmatism, undermining the economy, which directly ensures Germany's weight and opportunities on the world stage. The German political system was unable to ensure sustainable adherence to national interests and resist the destructive influence of supranational structures and foreign players. The justification for this policy was the fictitious threat from Russia in the form of cutting off energy supplies to Germany and using gas as a weapon. Despite all these fantasies, weapons were actually used against Germany, damaging its strategic gas infrastructure, which, however, was attributed to Russia's actions.

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Contribution of the author

The author declares no conflicts of interests.

Article info

Received: May 23, 2024. Approved after review: July 17, 2024. Accepted for publication: August 31, 2024. Published: September 23, 2024.

The author has read and approved the final manuscript.

Peer review info

«Russia & World: Scientific Dialogue» thanks the anonymous reviewers for their contribution to the peer review of this work.