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Pipeline demagogy?

The EU's framing of Russia in the policy realms of decarbonization and energy security before and after the annexation of Crimea in 2014

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Abstract

How the EU frames Russia before and after the Crimean annexation better our understanding of the motives and incentives behind a securitized unanimity in EU energy policy and decarbonization given previous internal dissensus. Europe's energy transition and security policy is contingent upon Russian relations, considering its gas dependency. Given the 2022 Ukrainian invasion, studying past rhetorical change instigated within the EU is relevant, using the 2014 annexation as a potential catalyst. Russian energy flows reaching the EU are decreasingly predictable since they pass through key transit states like Ukraine. An overview of recent EU-Russian normative trajectories becomes appropriate as the EU tackles an energy crisis and is interconnected with an unreliable energy provider. Complex interdependence is used to explain the EU's framing of Russia in energy relations, where mutual dependence, vulnerability and sensitivity to policy change define the states' well-being, as postulated by Keohane and Nye. Marco Siddi's conflict-cooperation dichotomy on the Russian Other supplements the framing analysis. An abductive coding approach forms the methodology, where the chosen material may inform the codes, alongside conceptual themes generated beforehand. The frames are applied to EU-parliamentary policy briefings, commission frameworks and bilateral EU-Russian roadmaps spanning between 2011-2016 with three yielded frames: 'Commercial ties and sunk costs', 'Jeopardized security order', and 'Fossil-bound authoritarianism'. These frames are divided into pre-and post-annexation sections. The outcome points to attitude shifts in the EU, from perceiving Russia as a Cooperative Other to an Antagonistic Other. This manifests itself within energy security realms and partly in decarbonization. All three frames imply an EU-Russian bilateral relationship entrenched with sunk costs and commitments—with ideological rifts widening in energy security where the EU frames Russia as a normative and contractual violator. The changed framing of Russia may thus help explain how EU energy policy experienced recent change.

Key words: EU, Russia, complex interdependence, decarbonization, securitization, energy politics, Othering, cooperation-conflict dichotomy

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1. Introduction

Europe is currently facing problems of less reliable natural gas provisions from third-party contractor states like Russia. Meanwhile, Russia's fossil fueled-economic growth is stagnating, in part given the world's reactions to the recent developments in Ukraine, alongside its military actions in the country. Gas and hydrocarbons are indispensable components of the Russian treasury—the EU being a major client. Circa 40% of the EU's gas comes from Russia, with almost \$120 million paid daily by the Union as a price of this dependence (Transport & Environment, 2022).

Russia's resurgent expansionism and gas exports stifle the Union's decarbonization plans and energy transition, therefore destabilizing EU energy politics. Besides, within Europe, energy crises occur increasingly—with impacts noticed especially during the winter of 2021. Insufficient energy availability has been overhanging in recent years, given the need to remodel the electric grid. Meanwhile, certain EU Member States are phasing out i.a. nuclear power simultaneously, at times regrettably importing hydrocarbons to curb the problems associated with power shortages (Popkostova, 2022: 3-4).

After Russia's invasion of Ukraine on the 24th of February 2022, the EU faced a new reality: witnessing unpredictable, aggressive behavior from its energy partner—perhaps opening a policy opportunity window. Russia was the EU's main hydrocarbon and fossil fuel supplier, placing the Union at an evident crossroads (Hofmann and Staeger, 2019: 334)

Looking backward, it also becomes integral understanding whether any foreboding events in EU-Russian relations incited any revision in the EU's energy policy in the context of changed attitudes and perceptions, in the years preceding the latest Ukrainian invasion. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 arguably serves as a comparable event in which the EU faced a reconsideration of ties to the Russian state as well, considering its energy dependency on Russian hydrocarbons.

A polemic in this thesis' puzzle was expressed by Polish ex-PM Donald Tusk (later head of the European Council), alluding to Germany's dependence on Russian gas in 2014 as unreliable for the EU27 regime: “Germany's dependence on Russian gas may effectively decrease Europe's sovereignty ... Merkel's Germany will have to correct some economic actions so that dependence on Russian gas doesn't paralyze Europe when it needs ... a decisive stance.” (Reuters, 2014).

The Russian Federation has amassed significant capacity, influence, and power during Putin's reign and made neighbors dependent and conceding in exchange for energy provisions.

Therefore, this thesis aims at studying significant policy documents between 2011-2016 to deduce whether the annexation of the Ukrainian peninsula caused a change in the EU's framing of Russia in its energy security and decarbonization frameworks.

Increased evidence implies that Russia's 'energy power' and Europe's dependency became a security issue considering Crimea's annexation. As suggested by Godzimirski, "single watershed events, like the Russian intervention in Ukraine, may change the rationales, logics and perceptions of energy cooperation" (2016: 103). The same researcher postulates that this may translate into attitudinal shifts, impacting European actors' closeness and distancing towards Russia within the energy realm and beyond.

It also becomes interesting studying the EU's framing of Russia in the years surrounding Crimea's annexation and investigating whether this in any way encouraged strengthened EU energy security commitments. The EU is also currently diversifying its energy sources while deploying increased geopolitical tactics against the Kremlin.

During March 8th, a few weeks after the February 2022 Ukraine invasion by Russia, Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, declared that:

We must become independent from Russian oil, coal, and gas. We simply cannot rely on a supplier who explicitly threatens us. We need to act now to mitigate the impact of rising energy prices, diversify our gas supply for next winter and accelerate the clean energy transition. The quicker we switch to renewables and hydrogen, combined with more energy efficiency, the quicker we will be truly independent. (European Commission, 2022)

Wider inferences on EU energy integration and defossilization can be drawn, by assessing policy material between 2011-2016. The published material may point to whether regional destabilizations like the 2014 annexation impacted the EU's framing of Russia in energy security policy and decarbonization initiatives, which this thesis seeks to investigate.

1.1 Aim

Given the recent sequences of violence in Ukraine, and the EU's sharp turns in energy policy, this research concerns itself with the decade-long crisis buildup in eastern Europe, guiding both Russia's and Europe's political dynamics. This investigation further aims at pinpointing whether there was a normative, attitudinal EU-wide shift driven by a similar event to today's crisis, one which may provide a foreboding function and understanding of the escalations at Eastern Europe's borderlands. By investigating EU-Russian relations while considering Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, this research aims at looking at whether the EU's framing

of Russia changed in the policy fields of decarbonization and energy security after Crimea was annexed in 2014, and whether this accelerated unison within the EU's energy policy.

This paper aims to discern any formative perceptions and attitudes pre- and post-2014 to understand whether Russia's actions in Crimea influenced rhetorical change and political initiatives, causing the EU to securitize its energy policy after 2014. Moreover, this research seeks to understand if this resembles today's drastic patterns of energy security reforms and decarbonization initiatives. It aims to do so by analyzing multiple EU energy policy frameworks published before and after the annexation through framing analysis. At best, bringing more clarity to whether the events in Crimea served as an ill-boding example for the EU's response to similar regional developments. The overarching aim involves mapping out EU-Russian relationships and addressing potential ideational or attitudinal migrations by conducting a framing analysis of six policy documents.

Further, this study seeks to analyze whether the Kremlin's hawkish foreign policy toward its *near abroad* influenced a change in the EU's framing of the country in its decarbonization and energy security strategies. In this context, decarbonization entails speeding up the energy transition away from fossil hydrocarbons to renewables. Energy security, however, concerns the EU acting as 'one face' with consensus and unity in energy policy. The application of complex interdependence and Marco Sidi's complementary conflict-cooperation dichotomy guide the interpretation of EU-Russian relations. Based on the above, the research question reads as follows:

1.2 Research Question

RQ: How did the EU's framing of Russia change in the areas of decarbonization and energy security after the annexation of Crimea in 2014?

This thesis is a representative case study seeking to generalize further, to current events, while investigating whether the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula was a turning point for the EU's framing of Russia in the realms of decarbonization and energy security.

1.3 Disposition

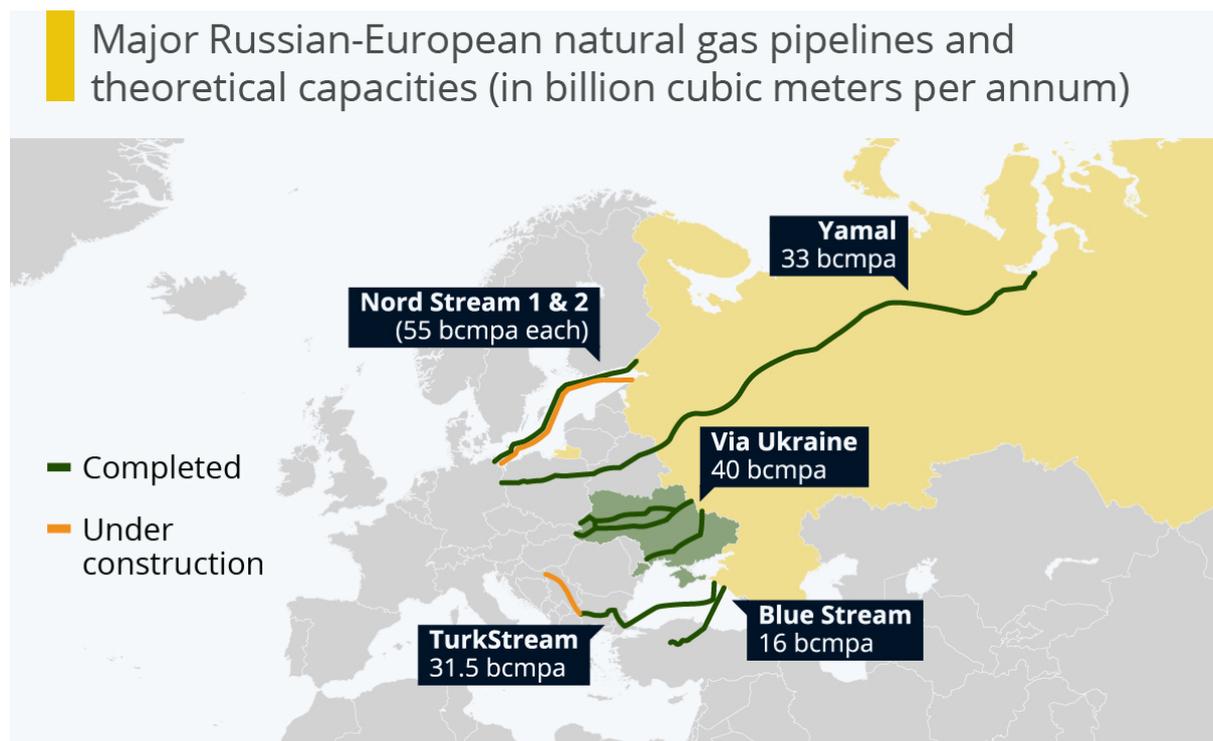
Following the introduction, research aim, importance of this thesis and research question—a historical background explains choosing Crimea as a relevant catalyst. Literary discourse and

earlier research follow, from which a presentation of the theoretical framework alongside the in-depth explanation of central concepts comes.

After this, the explanation of the methodological framework (research design) is presented, underpinning the thesis' following analysis structure. Then, a motivation of the data, material choices, case choice and key documents comes, which complements the methodology section. Further follows the delimitation section consisting of a timeline and temporal limits.

Then, the frames and concepts are operationalized with a critical account of the thesis' validity, from which a presentation of results follows. The results consist of a material (framing) analysis that ties back to the research question. The last section is dedicated to discussion and concluding remarks with further offered future research suggestions. The bibliography and code list are available in the appendix at the very end.

2. Historical background



Map 1: A map chart displaying the main natural gas pipeline links between Europe and Russia. Green lines show completed pipelines, orange is under construction. *Nota bene* that Nord Stream 2 has been suspended.

(Source: Statista)

2.1 Euromaidan and the Annexation of Crimea

Ukraine lies at the EU-Russian borderlands and is a vital location for energy transits. It is also a center of economic, political, and cultural activities in the eastern European region. Geopolitical tensions between Russia and its West-bound neighbor have worsened since the early 2000s, spilling over to EU-energy policy (Hofmann and Staeger, 2019: 334). Ukraine has also functioned as an artery of Russian energy flows to Europe, apart from the Nord Stream pipeline (ibid).

The turbulent Maidan uprisings during 2014 connect to the Ukrainian leadership pursuing warmer relations with the EU. In 2013, pro-Kremlin incumbent Viktor Yanukovich had been in power since 2002 on fraudulent electoral premises—representing industrial interests in eastern Ukraine with significant historical Russian ties (Kragh, 2022: 187). Up until the Maidan independence square protests, Yanukovich’s favorable relations with Moscow embodied the guarantees of Russian gas reaching the EU uninterruptedly (idem: 188). Moscow had also recurrently deployed linkage strategies in energy realms, the military, and politics to maintain control over former Soviet states (Güney and Korkmaz, 2014: 48). Therefore, Ukraine became both a “target and victim of gas disruptions”, consequently suffering gas crises and covert interventions (ibid). Hence, Ukraine’s growing debts to the Kremlin were fueled by the interlaced energy situation—causing worry in the Union (ibid).

The catalysts causing Ukrainian civil society to protest in late 2013, early 2014 were Yanukovich’s incalculable statements regarding the ‘Association Agreement’ negotiations with the EU (Kragh, 2022: 189). Yanukovich also enacted a Language Law in 2012, making Russian the second official language anew alongside Ukrainian (idem: 190). A backlash against this law held ramifications for Russia’s impending annexation of Crimea.

In late 2013, Yanukovich suspended the Association Agreement, which would have integrated Ukraine into liberalized trade relations with the EU (Huseynov, 2017: 588). As protests went nationwide, the (Euro-)maidan movement caused the removal of Yanukovich from office, putting him in exile (ibid).

The following Ukrainian government’s attempt at upheaving the Language law in 2014 became one of Russia’s official pretexts for intervening militarily in Crimea, allegedly “protecting the Russian-speaking population” in eastern Ukraine and Crimea from “Ukrainian fascists” accused of wanting to forbid the Russian language (Kuzio, 2015: 438).

Less than a week after Yanukovich's regime fell, soldiers "without any identifying insignia later hailed as representatives of Russian special forces and military intelligence GRU—appeared on the Crimean Peninsula, taking full military control of the area in a matter of days" (Haukkala, 2015: 34). A hasty referendum in March 2014 incorporated Crimea into the Russian Federation, and territorial losses became an irreversible fact (ibid).

The EU's immediate reaction to the annexation consisted of "extreme worry" and criticism (EEAS, 2014: 1). EU high representative Catherine Ashton expressed that the EU deplored "today's decision by Russia on the use of armed forces in Ukraine" and that the annexation was an "unwarranted" escalation of tensions (ibid). The representative also called upon "all sides to decrease the tensions immediately through dialogue, in full respect of Ukrainian and international law" (ibid).

In June 2014, Ukraine joined the Association Agreement under Pro-Western Petro Poroshenko alongside Georgia and Moldova (Kragh, 2022: 207). Meanwhile, Russia had disrupted the most fundamental aspects of the European security order: the inviolability, non-aggression, and sovereignty of territorial integrity (idem: 182).

3. Previous research

This thesis makes use of multiple contributions rooted in previous EU-Russian energy research and normative reviews of Russia from Western perspectives—influenced mainly by the findings of Leonard and Popescu, Liik, and Stančík et al. The Euro-Russian energy policy field is rather niched yet increased notably in quantity after 2014. One key aspect that this research paper discerns, involves the EU's earlier framings of Russia.

My investigation's interest stems from the conclusions of Leonard and Popescu's 2007 "Power Audit of EU-Russian Relations", where both researchers conducted the first bilateral power audit on the topic. Their verdict was that EU-Member States could be divided into five groups (*Trojan Horses*, *Strategic partners*, *Friendly Pragmatists*, *Frosty Pragmatists* and *New Cold Warriors*) in their range of amicability and defense of Russian interests, and that these five EU groups fall into a two-fold split or paradigm in their framing of Russia. One faction favored integration and economic relations, seeing Russia as a potential partner "that can be drawn into the EU's orbit through a process of 'creeping integration', favoring involving Russia in as many institutions as possible and encouraging Russian investment in the EU's energy sector" (2007: 2).

However, the other faction, framed Russia as a threat or enemy: “Russian expansionism and contempt for democracy must be rolled back through a policy of ‘soft containment’ that involves excluding Russia from the G8, expanding NATO ... and excluding Russian investment from the European energy sector” (2007: 2).

This thesis departs from Leonard and Popescu’s divisive framing of Russia, but analyzes the EU from a supranational lens, rather than from a Member State perspective. Partly, because integration increased tangibly along most sectors within the Union, and because relations have worsened since.

Kadri Liik’s 2018 follow-up audit on “Winning The ‘Normative War’ With Russia” also makes relevant conclusions. Liik reiterates a recurring normative red line of disagreement and conflictual perception guiding EU-Russian relations. Where the EU operates in a world of ‘mutual dependence’, Russia practices ‘defensive insularism’ (2018: 2, 10). This normative struggle is governed by the “EU’s horizontal practices versus Russia’s leader-centric power vertical”, i.e., a struggle between the EU’s liberal international order against Russia’s *realpolitik*. Given the lack of power audits and normative reviews ever since, my research intends relating back to a normative approach, highlighting the incongruence of Russia’s and EU’s perceptions, and to complement previous research findings with other, recent inputs.

In the 2021 article *Villain or victim? Framing strategies and legitimation practices in the Russian perspective on the European Union’s Third Energy Package*, Stančík et al pose similar questions to this thesis, albeit from an opposite, Russia-to-EU perspective. In their findings, Russia frames the EU as a misguided partner, deceptive counterpart, or geopolitical rival (Stančík et al, 2021: 11). This thesis investigates whether EU27 perceptions of Russia in energy policy after Crimea’s annexation may hold similar implications to their findings.

Concretely, this research aims contributing to the wider field by expanding on—and combining these previously *empirical* contributions, alongside the theoretical perspectives of Keohane and Nye on complex interdependence coupled with Siddi’s ideational matrix (see the next chapter). This paper intends to affirm the notion of internal contradictions within the Union, affecting the European opinion landscape on Russian trust and perceptions in its entirety, as reiterated above.

This thesis wishes to fill an ideational dimension or gap often missing in EU-Russian relational research, where material perspectives otherwise dominate, elaborated on below. By using various literary sources to map out political shifts between 2011 and 2016, this selection also gains relevance connected to the resurged and deepened on-going conflict and sudden, full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia in 2022.

4. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework in this thesis builds on three crucial conceptual perspectives. The first concept is the umbrella term of complex interdependence coined by Keohane and Nye, where this paper concerns itself with using the terms of *vulnerability* and *sensitivity interdependence* as operational indicators in the forthcoming analysis (see definitions in section 4.1). The second theoretical input is an *Othered* Russia illustrated in Marco Siddi's theoretical matrix (see 4.2). Thirdly, this thesis uses Güney and Korkmaz's perspective on *securitization*, initially accounted for by Keohane and Nye (4.3).

These three main sets of concepts were chosen because they in one way or another may help capture the EU's normative migration in its framing of Russia within energy security policy. Where complex interdependence considers the complexity of international bonds and affordability of change, *Othering* instead plays into the normative power dynamics at hand, while *securitization* helps explain the urgency in the EU's desire for both diversification and (decarbonized) energy security reforms against a changed security backdrop.

Moreover, framing analysis is used as tool to appropriately capture these concepts. In brief, framing is described as an analytical tool where frames can convey covert ideas, values, and certain representations which dominate in specific contexts and manifest in key words, phrases, perspectives, or narratives communicated through text or image (Esaiasson, 2017: 218).

Lastly, this research approach distinguishes itself from previous research by fusing complex interdependence as an umbrella term with Marco Siddi's normative conflict-cooperation dichotomy.

4.1. Complex interdependence, sensitivity, and vulnerability

The notion of interdependence is a cornerstone within the liberalist school of international relations, security, and development studies. In short, interdependence stipulates commercial trade relations and similar interstate exchange as generating outcomes of politico-economic stability and peace (Morgan, 2019: 33).

Complex interdependence, however, stems from international political economy, popularized by scholars Keohane and Nye, and functions as an ideal type in an ever more globalized world order. Complex interdependence is defined as: "states [being] mutually

dependent on each other for their well-being” and posits that any “given outcome in international life will depend upon where a state sits on that spectrum [of dependence]” (Keohane and Nye, 2012: xv).

With complex interdependence comes asymmetry, wherein the dimensions of sensitivity and vulnerability have relevance. The *sensitivity aspect* of interdependence expresses itself across social, political, and economic axes (Keohane and Nye, 2012: 11). *Vulnerability interdependence* is more extensive and concerns a cost-benefit bargaining calculus. In turn, affecting actors' responses and motives (see operationalization, section 7).

Keohane and Nye argue that complex interdependence complements the realist spectrum, which provides an otherwise “insufficient explanation for the mechanics of the modern world” (2012: xv). This paper intends studying the complementary segment of their spectrum. Moreover, an operationalization framing complex interdependence is found further down for higher face validity (see section 7.2; *ibid*).

Considering Europe’s existing Russian gas dependency, the EU’s difficult task to find alternative or new energy regimes are argued to be grounded in “the differences among Europeans in their level of sensitivity and vulnerability interdependence” (Güney and Korkmaz, 2014: 50).

4.2 The EU-Russian conflict-cooperation dichotomy: Russia as the *Other*

This thesis considers the EU’s perception of Russia as conflicting or cooperative, a perception governed by a dynamic of dichotomy and complexity. According to Siddi, Russia is ‘Othered’ by the EU—since the regime became perceived as a “predominantly/exclusive security threat due to long-standing conflictual interaction”, as relations have regressed in intermittent cycles (2020: 559).

Etymologically, the Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy defines the *Other*, *Otherness*, or *Othering* as a term intended to: “circumscribe other human beings, and their differences from me (or us). The otherness of other people can be underplayed, leading to charges of privileging the self or selves from whom they are supposed to be not so different, or overplayed” (2022). This research replaces ‘human’ with state or regime.

When applying Otherness to Siddi's framework in an energy trade context, the EU’s Russia-perceptions are Janus-faced, reflected in the two axes used by Siddi: 1) the constructions of the Russian Other as central or marginal to national identity and 2) whether the perceived outcome is antagonistic or cooperative (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Identity constructions of the Russian Other and energy policy towards Russia (Siddi, 2020: 547). This figure is also found in the Appendix.

The antagonist end of the axis represents Russia as a “political and security threat” and energy trade with it is seen as undesirable, a source of vulnerability for the country involved (in this case the EU27) (Siddi, 2020: 547). Conversely, on the cooperative end, “energy cooperation with Russia is seen as both commercially advantageous and politically desirable because it strengthens bilateral relations and leads to a rapprochement in unrelated areas, including people-to-people contacts” (ibid).

On the other hand, where the Russian Other is marginal to identity construction, energy policy is relegated to technicalities and commercialism (Siddi, 2020: 547). “Economics usually trumps politics” in the marginal dimension—regardless of more positive perceptions of Russia (ibid).

Historically, the EU-Russia energy relationship was “more cooperative ... further away from the geographical EU-Russia border” (Siddi, 2020: 546). However, “the conflictual dimension of the dichotomy is particularly strong near the geographical contact zone between the EU and Russia”, notably among states like Poland or the Baltic trio—for which the annexation of Crimea resurged Soviet-like geopolitical remnants, that of a militaristic and authoritarian past (idem: 558).

As the EU deepened its integration project in the past few years (i.a. with the Lisbon treaty), Marco Siddi’s framework assists this notion theoretically by mapping the ideational migrations which impact Russia-EU relations at a macro level. In sum, these varying perceptive

dimensions constitute the conflict-cooperation dichotomy which ideationally shapes the EU's framing of Russia in energy relations that this thesis deems relevant and makes use of.

4.3 Securitization in energy politics

The third main concept elaborated on, stems from i.a. Güney and Korkmaz's contributions in the energy field, and concerns the securitization perspective put forth earlier by Keohane and Nye as well. Securitization at large, encompasses a transition from politicization to a rhetoric of necessity, emergency, urgency, and existential threats (as reflected in the definition below).

Keohane and Nye claim that the securitization of energy means that “actors are aware of the possibility of ceasing to be an economically functioning unit if changes occur” (Güney and Korkmaz, 2014: 36). Securitization is an integral and relevant concept, as it is a vital for understanding the EU's vulnerability and sensitivity interdependence in its role as a supranational actor.

Several indicators imply a ‘securitized’ energy policy change in the EU, transitioning from its Member States disagreeing in their perceptions of Russia to uniting as ‘one face’ and supranational entity. Güney and Korkmaz pose a concrete example, where a “common European energy strategy ... the ‘Energy Union’ strategy, is more often voiced and heard in European circles” (2014: 38). This notion of commonality and the Energy Union, ties back to the research aim, and reaffirms the concept's importance. Deducing whether the EU's changed framing of Russia reflects a securitized energy policy therefore becomes relevant for analyzing the EU's perception of Russia after Crimea's annexation, since this thesis also concerns itself with energy security realm.

As posited by these two researchers, EU-Russian relations continuously reaffirm and question the Union's *raison d'etre*, its economic incentives and climate goals (Güney and Korkmaz, 2014: 36). Moreover, Russian gas in European circles is also described as a securitized spiral, rooted in past intermittent crises (2014: 36). Given this context, securitized energy relations between the EU and Russian Federation hold vast implications for the state of liberal democracy and continental renewable transition efforts. Besides, the Kremlin's rhetorical-military approach to its neighbors' territorial integrity may shape the grounds on which the EU makes energy political decisions.

Since Crimea's annexation, the European Union launched multiple hydrocarbon supply diversion maneuvers and large-scale renewables initiatives. The Union faces moral and material energy substitution challenges, concerning diverting from Russian gas supplies to

alternative providers—elements typical of securitization as a phenomenon. One foundational project is the European Commission’s funded *Southern Gas Corridor* in the Caspian Sea, passing through i.a. Azerbaijan—an indirect Russian ally and co-partner, implying another security dilemma (Wintour, 2022; Verhoeven, 2018: 247).

5. Methodology

5.1. Framing analysis and case study

This chapter describes the reasoning behind the method choice for the forthcoming analysis. A step-by-step account of how the results were obtained is given below. This section also accounts for how the four parts of Entman’s framing setup (definition of a problem, causal diagnostics, moral judgments, and remedy suggestions) were found within the results and why they were appropriate.

Framing as a tool is appropriate in this type of research since this analytical method allows for mapping out and discerning motives, stakeholders, themes, and further implications. Formally, in Entman’s set-up, frames are meant to raise the salience of textual communication and to “promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (1993: 52).

In practical detail, framing according to this set-up consisted of seeking out codes from the policy documents’ themes and content, which were then sorted into three larger code groups (each group resembling a frame) when codes were too distinctive to be paired. Parallel, apparent widespread themes of Russia as an Antagonistic Other, decarbonization or hydrocarbon diversification appeared in all the groups, while also relating the codes to Entman’s four elements. This analytical tool is appropriate, as there is a clear actor involved, in this case the EU—promoting a particular perspective and stance on Russia through its energy policies. Framing is a conceptual tool deployed to operationalize the EU’s rhetoric and attitudes towards Russia. This is what a frame looks like in its four-part setup:

- (1) definition of a problem,
- (2) diagnosis of its causes,
- (3) moral judgment of the involved actors,
- (4) suggestion of possible remedies to the problem described

Through this setup we may better our understanding of the EU's framing of Russia before and after the annexation. A frame analysis may generate insights into potential EU motives that may explain increased consensus in otherwise disputed areas like energy securitization and decarbonization in this research field.

A qualitative approach underpins this thesis' methodology as a case study of the normative (and material) drivers of the EU's changed framing of Russia. This approach is supposed to help reconcile the securitization of EU energy and decarbonization policy which appear increasingly intertwined. The EU's energy policy has experienced recurring crises fueled by internal dissensus likewise by external factors, hence this thesis serves to argue that Crimea's 2014 annexation is a case of an external shock to the Union's economic structure in energy affairs and to its existence.

The framing analysis was conducted *abductively* with the use of coding, and a grounded theory approach influenced the analyzed material (pre-2014 and post-2014 EU documents): allowing for concepts and codes to be re-evaluated during the analytical stage without being constrained to pre-decided hypotheses (Corbin and Strauss, 2008: 864). Meaning, that the coding procedure combined a bottom-up, grounded approach, while also making use of some theoretically pre-defined, guiding concepts for a theoretical convergence with the empirical material. Thus, the data in these texts may guide and shape the results obtained. With multiple rounds of coding comes higher intracode reliability, as well as a framework theoretically congruent with the empirical material, allowing for more reliable elaborations (Teorell and Svensson, 2007: 264).

The texts were examined by operationalizing key concepts, while making the material susceptible to new, potentially challenging themes appearing in the texts. Primarily, the themes were reflected in the codes concerning vulnerability/sensitivity, Othering, renewables, energy diversification, and security. The codes connected to the frames were primarily influenced by theoretically laden concepts, since aspects of this paper involved mapping out a potential transition in the EU's framing, or perception of Russia through a securitized energy policy.

Lastly, the operational indicators of complex interdependence were applied to the frame setup, from which the texts went through multiple coding rounds. A final code list was then compiled based on the findings with the help of *Atlas.ti* software (list found in Appendix, see procedure details in section 5.2).

5.2 Data and Material selection

Concerning the appropriate data, background information was obtained from academic literature, literary articles/journals, and news agency press statement material. To find my primary documents for the analysis I consulted a previous Italian EU-parliamentary assistant from the ITRE committee (on industry, research, and energy). In my online search I used roughly a dozen thematic words pertaining to energy; ‘+ security’, ‘politics’, ‘natural gas’, ‘Crimea’, ‘Ukraine’, ‘Energy Union’, ‘Russia’, ‘+ policy’ on platforms such as the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS)—a think-tank influencing EU-legislation. To find EU-legislation, case-law and other public documents EUR-LEX was used. I also filtered the timespan to 2011- 2016 when looking for analysis material, as well as when seeking out documents in the EU-Commission’s publication catalogue. When certain documents mentioned related agreements or referred to earlier documents with seeming relevance, it allowed for a snowball-like sampling.

Six policy documents deemed especially formative or thematically relevant constitute the brunt of the analysis. These were the outcome of a strategic selection of ca 20 otherwise related documents in the search results. The excluded texts would e.g., concern industry-specific policy, have a lot of financial-industrial jargon, or explain technicalities related to highly specific procedures such as natural gas pipeline setups. Such texts were thus eventually excluded as they became irrelevant for this thesis’ scope. The documents below ended up making it into the chosen sample:

- the 2011 “2050 EU energy roadmap” proposed by the Commission,
- the 2013 policy briefing scrutinizing EU-Russian climate and energy policies,
- the 2013 “EU-Russian Energy Cooperation until 2050” set out between the Commission and Russian Government,
- the (May) 2014 “European Energy Security Strategy” framework, set out by the European Commission,
- the 2015 Energy Union framework set out by the European Commission,
- the 2016 briefing and overviewing guide on the EU’s Russia Policy, with “Five guiding principles”.

After selecting these six documents as research material, they went through multiple rounds of abductive coding in the Atlas.ti software. I initially obtained 43 codes and 163 quotes in total,

which all corresponded to the framing setup and research question somehow. From this sample, ca 30 quotes with key codes present were deemed representative and made into the final analysis. Moreover, 20 codes ended up being used (see full code list in Appendix). The codes were both excluded if they i.a. occurred too seldom in quantity, but mainly if they represented themes/terms that were too specific or slightly outside of my research question's scope. When the 20 final codes were sorted into three code groups (A-B-C), having more than 10 codes per frame or group seemed excessive for this type of analysis. Some codes overlap in two, three frames—however, signifying the essence of the analysis' findings. An active search for any references to costs-benefits, policy adaptation, renewables, decarbonization, EU-Russian perceptions, and energy security was also made in the documents.

All the chosen documents somehow pertained to energy resilience, security, renewable energy, EU-Russian relations (overtly or covertly), and interdependence. After coding the data partly based on pre-defined theoretical concepts/codes, and by letting the material influence the codes, the three overarching frames/code groups formed an analytical scheme.

The compilation of the subsequent findings into the frame schemes allowed for making interpretations and pursuing explanations. This strategy provided a structured insight into the EU's changed framing of Russia partially expressed in new energy policy trajectories within energy security and decarbonization.

The material choice of the documents is motivated based on the premise of official Commission documents giving a “top-down” perspective on the matter (the EU's executive branch) whereas Parliamentary policy briefings allow for assessing relations from a “bottom-up” perspective (since the EP makes up the Union's legislative body). Policy briefings may provide more explicit, overt security assessments and include components of ‘naming-and-shaming’ that diplomatic documents put forth by the Commission may otherwise avoid, all considering intended audiences and stakes. Besides, EU energy policy documents published around my timespan considered Russia to some degree, given its role as a main supplier—dealing with i.a. imports, exports, and future relations.

6. Limitations

The main challenge was finding ‘symmetrically’ valid proposals or EU Commission statements not preceding more than a few years to Crimea's annexation. A simultaneous challenge was picking specific points in time before EU-Russian energy relations worsened or went into a

more static state—all while concerning Crimea as a case of an external shock to EU’s energy policy and litmus test for the research question.

Besides, it is notably complex to isolate relationships between explanatory variables in this type of research, which could have explained a sharper change in framing. Hence this research makes no such claims. It tries to provide an *overview* of how the EU expressed a changed framing of Russia, concerning decarbonization and energy security after Crimea was annexed, departing from documents before and after 2014.

Previous research also encompasses the Union’s increased renewable and climatic ambitions after 2014, demarcating an entrenched liberal collaborative project. However, this thesis does not focus on this. Rather, it concentrates on the EU’s changed framing of Russia in energy politics. Specifically, within the realms of decarbonization and energy security after the annexation.

6.1. Timeline

The delimitation in time (2011-2016) was motivated by scholarly inputs and considerations of geopolitical events. Energy scholar Margarita Balmaceda (2021: 243) expressed that EU-Russian energy relations momentarily “peaked in 2011”—an assessment rooted in the commissioning of the Nord Stream pipeline project that year. Since Russia annexed Crimea in Ukraine in March of 2014, it serves as a given juncture and midpoint for the pre- and post-annexation framing analysis sections (see Results).

The later limit to the timeframe, 2016, is temporally proximate to Crimea, coinciding with Russia’s involvement in the Syrian war. Moreover, 2016 marks one year after the enactment of the statutory Paris Agreement. Thus, this upper bound may account for political initiatives in response to the annexation. Note, however, that EU-Russian energy dialogues became largely suspended after 2014 (Krushcheva and Maltby, 2016: 805). Besides, the 2016 “EU principles on Russia” policy document functions as a policy exclamation mark from the EU: functioning as a clear, written, and elaborated judgment on approaching the Kremlin’s political behavior in the past few years.

7. Operationalization

7.1 Validity

This thesis consists of a qualitative case study examined through six policy documents (a small N)—making the validity dimension a fair research criterion to account for, otherwise usually relevant for quantitative research, unlike this study. Moreover, Alan Bryman (2014: 351f) also advocates for the use of validity when assessing qualitative research.

Validity concerns itself with the congruence of a concept's theoretical definition and its operational indicators (Esaiasson et al., 2017: 63). Multiple operational indicators in this paper stem from theoretical concepts such as complex interdependence, to achieve a higher validity while minimizing systematic errors in the analytical stage.

However, Teorell and Svensson underline a fundamental conflict between validity and opportunities for generalizability as “an extensive design maximizes the opportunities for generalizability, yet has lower validity”, whereas intensive designs bring forth higher validity, albeit make it harder to draw general conclusions based on small-case studies (2007: 264-268). Thus, the results cannot make claims going beyond this thesis' delimitations in time or have implications for other segments of the political echelon beyond the EU or Russia.

Defining, exemplifying, and studying complex interdependence (from the chosen samples of six documents) may generate higher validity. Nonetheless, situational adjustments in an intensive research design increase the possibility of excluding or correcting systematic sources of error. On the other hand, this may increase the risk of arbitrary differences during measurement and execution, which in turn may lessen reliability (Teorell and Svensson, 2007: 264-284).

As for potential concerns and skewness, Entman posits that “frames highlight some bits of information about an item that is the subject of a communication, thereby elevating them in salience” (1993: 53). Parallel, scholars Kahneman and Tversky, claim that “most frames are defined by what they omit as well as include, and the omissions of potential problem definitions, explanations, evaluations, and recommendations may be as critical as the inclusions in guiding the audience” (idem: 54). When elevating information in salience, consistency matters, involving including quotes and examples, which is vital for clarifying how the material excerpts relate to the frames' defined problems, causes, moral judgements and remedies (ibid). A code list showing the codes highlighted in the frames and those omitted in

the framing analysis (Table 1) is also available in the Appendix to account for the inclusion-exclusion process transparently.

Furthermore, the policy documents chosen before and after the 2014 annexation were triangulated through different stakeholders in the EU political system to justify and motivate the frames from sources with varying political motives. Selecting ‘internal’ EU material with similar policy jargon arguably increases comparativeness while methodologically preventing interpretative inconsistencies as well.

Nevertheless, this thesis acknowledges that Crimea’s annexation may have influenced the tone or philology of the 2014-2016 energy policy documents, which any reader should consider. Moreover, for external reliability (and replicability) to be critiqued in qualitative social scientific research, one should acknowledge that social realities are rarely subject to, or even possible to re-examine or ‘pause in time’ (Bryman, 2014: 352). Besides, the policy documents used in this thesis have been published and made available, functioning as snapshots from their times’ discourse, and may thus fit for some form of replication or external generalizability.

7.2. Framing complex interdependence

Overt aspects of EU-Russian relations become visible while extracting underlying assumptions in the texts through operationalizing significant terms (Esaiasson et al., 2017: 38). This thesis thus maps out EU-Russian relations and addresses potential attitudinal migrations through applying frames to the texts.

In line with conceptual definitions and the methodology, the umbrella term ‘complex interdependence’ is operationalized. Specifically, the sub-dimensions or indicators of ‘sensitivity’ and ‘vulnerability’ (operationalized below) are sought after in the coding rounds. The operationalization of *sensitivity* and *vulnerability interdependence* also stems from Güney and Korkmaz’s examination of these interdependence aspects. From the cornerstones of ‘complex interdependence’, these interdependence aspects are operationalized as follows:

1. Sensitivity interdependence is defined as ‘the degree of responsiveness within a policy framework, which focuses on how quickly the changes in one country bring costly changes in another and how great these costly effects are (Güney and Korkmaz, 2014: 36)
2. Vulnerability interdependence is, however, related to the affordability of, or availability of alternatives under the cost imposed by the changes in one country (ibid)

The subsections that follow, present the frames based on Entman’s four-set approach (see Methodology). These frames are described chronologically and interchangeably to track any change in attitude, relations, and energy policy. Important quotes or coded sections from the documents are inserted to support the findings and motivate each claim to a frame feature. Further down, a table summarizing the frames and their main codes can be found (see Table 1).

The chronological structure is as follows: 2011 and 2013 constitute the Pre-Annexation section of the analysis, while the material from 2014, 2015, and 2016 makes up the post-annexation section below. At first glance, it might seem questionable that most of the framing analysis is found in the post-annexation section. However, the analytical outcome arguably reflects the worsening conditions of EU-Russian relations and relates to the turbulence of geopolitical events *after* 2014—reflected in the EU’s policy briefs and political communication below.

8. Results

This section dissects Entman’s four framing figures by applying them to each frame (A, B, C; see Table 1 below) and analyzes the EU’s framing of Russia through the policy themes of decarbonization and energy security. Sections 9-9.4 cover the pre-annexation frames, with sections 10-10.9 analyzing EU-to-Russia frames after the annexation until 2016.

9. Pre-Annexation sub-frames: 2011-2013

9.1 Diagnosing causes: Commercial ties and sunk costs

There are two reasons for why a state of commercial entrenchment and sunk costs has arisen in the EU. First, pre-existing natural gas pipeline agreements between the Union and Russia as well as projects on the political roundtable (Nord Stream 2), have led up to a dependency (coded as ‘energy dependency’ in Table 1).

Second, before Russia’s annexation, the EU and Russia recognize their seeming interdependence in both entities’ financial/energy relations. The code that best corresponds to this is Russia as a ‘Cooperative Other’ (Table 1)—a diplomatic state which until recently

allowed for continental pipelines to expand as partnerships between the two have been deemed fruitful and important:

Over the past half century, Russia has been a vital supplier of energy to the EU. But if Russia is important to the EU, the EU as a neighbor with half a billion energy consumers in a unified internal market is just as important to Russia (EC and Energy Ministry of The Russian Federation, 2013: 3)

... Further cooperation within the EU-Russia Energy Dialogue on specific gas infrastructure projects, continuing close and regular proactive exchanges on relevant domestic policy measures that impact on Russian business in the EU and EU business in the Russian Federation (idem: 15)

The quotes above show some of the financial-commercial, jointly perceived benefits that the EU and Russia reiterated to one another through their energy relations.

9.2 Make moral judgments: Commercial ties and sunk costs

This discursive aspect highlights that the EU and Russia have a tightly associated and entrenched energy relationship stretching beyond revenue, with a positive spillover effect trickling down to political expectations. The aspect is associated with the codes/terms ‘Cooperative Other’, ‘energy dependency’ (as aforementioned), and ‘positive spillover’ where the EU’s earlier perceived benevolence of Russia has manifested as a precondition for stable and sustainable energy provisions.

Natural gas is of immense importance in the energy relationship between the EU and Russian Federation. While it is not as large – in energy and financial terms – as the trade in crude oil and oil products, its importance for many EU member states is greater because of the high level of dependence on Russian gas. For the Russian Federation, EU countries represent by far its largest export market for gas and a very substantial source of foreign exchange earnings (European Commission and Energy Ministry of The Russian Federation, 2013: 10)

This excerpt underlines the energy dependency and import-export stakes in the natural gas/hydrocarbon sector, framed as important rather than problematic.

9.3 Diagnosing causes: Fossil-bound authoritarianism

According to this frame (C, Table 1), Russia’s illicit behavior sanctioned a fossil reliance rooted in the EU perceiving Russia as a ‘Cooperative Other’ (Siddi, 2020: 547; Table 1). Given the

Russian Federation's increasing authoritarian tendencies, and the EU pursuing economic-energetic ties with this actor, this intertwined influence made the Union vulnerable. The excerpt below is from a 2013 document, the European Commission and Energy Ministry of the Russian Federation Joint 2050 Roadmap:

To mitigate the risks related to energy production, both sides have an interest to strengthen their cooperation on safety issues. This includes the exploration and production of hydrocarbons, as well as increased cooperation on nuclear safety ... In line with the general Roadmap 2050 objectives, both sides should aim at a progressive integration of the oil infrastructure functioning and the harmonized development of oil markets (2013: 4; 19)

Risk is resolved, as seen above, by the EU being resolute in 'harmonizing' fossil fuel markets with Russia under joint legislation to deepen cooperation.

9.4 Make moral judgments: Fossil bound authoritarianism

The 'antagonistic Other' is once more a code dominating the discourse on evaluating Russia from an ideational-environmental point of view. In a 2013 policy briefing on EU-Russian energy and climate change policy, the following disjuncture is presented:

The EU and Russia are also divided by their environmental policies, stemming from a different environmental sensibility ... fighting against climate change, the EU has committed to reduce its overall GHG emissions by 20% by 2020 ... Unlike Europe ... Moscow has long been driven by more economic and geostrategic factors ... Moscow [resists] integrating climate issues in its policies (AFET, 2013: 1)

The quote above illustrates Russia's antagonistic Otherness by outlining it as "different" in sensibility, where Moscow is "unlike Europe" and displays unwelcome 'resistance' to climate considerations, thus being fundamentally driven by other factors (politically and literally). This ideational-environmental clash is further supported by Russia's 'relief' in having abundant fossil fuels while modestly addressing renewables as an energy source:

In a public conference in April 2013, Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev confirmed that Russian policies were based on the country's 'abundance of hydrocarbons': 'That doesn't mean that we must refuse traditional sources in favour of new one because we have enough traditional [sources], thank heavens, for many years to come. Nevertheless, this percentage [the percentage of renewables on total energy] should change (AFET, 2013: 5).

These two statements together pinpoint the differently perceived paradigms of 'fighting climate change' (the EU) as opposed to holding onto 'traditional [energy] sources' (Russia).

10. Post-Annexation sub-frames: 2014-2016

10.1 Define problems: Commercial ties and sunk costs

Three central codes correspond to Entman's category of defining a problem, namely 'energy dependency', 'natural gas' and 'vulnerability interdependence' (Frame A, Table 1). The problem's main feature lies in the Union's susceptibility to Russian gas linkages and unexpected leveraging exercises by Russian energy actors, consisting of material and policy costs alike, surfacing after the disruption in Ukraine in 2014, revealing the extent of the union's dependence on Russian energy exports:

In view of current events in Ukraine and the potential for disruption to energy supplies, short term action must focus on those countries that are dependent on one single gas supplier (EC, 2014: 4)

As shown above, the European Commission highlights the need to re-steer its energy policy in an emergency manner, given its new recognition of possible energy disruptions.

[Some vulnerability remains] ... The European Commission is also tackling Russian gas giant Gazprom's abuse of its dominant position on EU energy markets, with an ongoing investigation into its pricing practices: some countries pay Gazprom up to 40 % more for natural gas than others (EPRS, 2016: 5)

The vulnerability aspect on the other hand, is clearly illustrated above, considering Russian gas-market dominance and how the EU frames Russia as 'abusive' in a commercial context.

10.2 Suggest remedies: Commercial ties and sunk costs

The solutions proposed by this frame involve (from a material-commercial perspective) reducing partnerships in vulnerable fora such as energy. Instead, selective engagement on transnational issues and cooperation in areas is proposed where the Union is not directly dependent on Russia, involving fewer partner-to-partner stakes or risks. Consequently, the main codes are 'selective engagement', 'vulnerability interdependence' and 'renewable investments' (Frame A in Table 1; see quotes below):

[The EU should] despite tensions, [be] engaging selectively with Russia on a range of foreign policy issues, among them cooperation on the Middle East, counterterrorism, and climate change (EPRS, 2016: 2)

Areas of cooperative, selective engagement are, as seen above, relegated to areas of i.a. international (climate) politics and anti-terrorism.

Domestically produced energy also contributes to decreasing Europe's energy import dependence. This includes notably renewables, needed for decarbonisation, as well as conventional and - for those Member States that choose it - non-conventional fossil resources (EC, 2014: 22)

After the annexation, the EU's renewable investment schemes pose different propositions than before (compare with sections 9.1, 9.2). Besides this quote's emphasis on renewables and import dependence, the Commission pledges to "increase the share of renewable energy to at least 27% by 2030 (2014: 12).

10.3 Define problems: Jeopardized security order

The problem definition is rooted in the "vulnerable gas dependency" where certain EU Member States are more fragile than others (EC, 2014: 2). The extent of the EU's perceived dependency varies internally, yet its vulnerability on a macro-scale renders precarity for the Union according to this frame. In turn, the EU securitizes its previously divided and pluralistic energy policy (among its Member States), therefore the code 'securitization of energy security' applies:

... there is a need to improve cooperation, solidarity and trust in the Central and South-Eastern part of Europe. Dedicated cooperation arrangements would help to accelerate the better integration of these markets into the wider European energy market which would improve the liquidity and resilience of the energy system ... The Commission will take concrete initiatives in this regard as an urgent priority (EC, 2015: 11)

10.4 Diagnosing causes: Jeopardized security order

The EU considers the annexation a 'breach of international law' (see Frame B, Table 1 below) and as symbolic of Russian unreliability interlinked with the EU's gas relation sensitivity. This perspective resonates with Güney and Korkmaz' policy framework responsiveness (sensitivity), by recognizing "how quickly the changes in one country bring costly changes in another and how great these costly effects are" (2014: 36):

such interruptions [of Russian transitory gas cut-offs to Ukraine 2009 and 2014] highlight the risks of over-dependence, particularly for countries, such as the Baltic states, Finland, Slovakia and Hungary, which import all or nearly all of their gas from Russia (EPRS, 2016: 5)

Thus, as reflected in the excerpt, Russia's leverage over European gas networks and energy considering the annexation, constitutes a threat to European security as such and requires changed policy course.

10.5 Make moral judgments: Jeopardized security order

In this frame Russia is perceived as an unreliable energy partner and contractual breacher that pursues turbulent policy decisions, disallowing long-term planning and lawfully bound trust (see quote below).

The 2015 Energy Union framework insinuates this, albeit with formal jargon and without mentioning Russia explicitly. Nota bene that Russia is a third party and of relevance since it is an almost exclusive gas provider to the EU, particularly for the most vulnerable Member States. However, in EU-parliamentary excerpts of other documents (i.a. the 2016 guiding principles on EU's Russia policy), or in an MP-to-MP context, the purpose of the Energy Union largely revolves around the threats of being dependent on Russia as an extensive gas contractor. The section on 'more transparency in gas supply' proves this point where the code 'securitization of energy security' (Table 1; frame B) applies:

The Commission will assess options ... for collective purchasing of gas during a crisis and where Member States are dependent on a single supplier ... Commission participation in such negotiations with third countries and a move towards standard contract clauses could also more effectively avoid undue pressure and ensure respect of European rules (EC, 2015: 6-7)

Continuing with naming one's threats, Russia is framed as an 'Antagonistic Other' again, where energy trade is not desirable as the country poses political security threats (Siddi, 2020: 546; Table 1). According to the European Parliament and its research think-tank Russia uses energy as a political weapon:

An EP resolution welcomes efforts outlined in the European Commission's 2015 proposals for an Energy Union to reduce dependence on energy imports from Russia, denounced as 'an unreliable partner ... which uses its energy supplies as a political weapon' (EPRS, 2016: 8)

10.6 Suggest remedies: Jeopardized security order

The solutions to curb the negative security developments in EU-Russian relations given Crimea's annexation mainly concern the EU's internal market and self-sufficiency reforms:

The EU has made reducing dependence on energy imports from third countries such as Russia a priority of its 2014 energy security strategy and its 2015 strategy on an Energy Union (EPRS, 2016: 5)

To introduce common crisis management, the Commission will propose preventive and emergency plans at regional and EU level ... Given its particular vulnerability, there is a need to improve cooperation, solidarity and trust in the Central and South-Eastern part of Europe. Dedicated cooperation arrangements would help to accelerate the better integration of these markets into the wider European energy market which would improve the liquidity and resilience of the energy system and would allow full use of the region's energy efficiency and renewable energy potential. The Commission will take concrete initiatives in this regard as an urgent priority (EC, 2015: 5-6; 11)

The second quote above proposes the enactment of an 'Energy Union mechanism', which is the corresponding code. The EU also suggests diversifying any hydrocarbon imports to other suppliers, coded as 'Southern Gas Corridor' (Table 1; frame B).

As implied above, the EU seeks to strengthen integration and accelerate the renewable energy transition. The Union also actively considers alternative energy routes. One of the suggested routes is the Southern Gas Corridor—a pipeline network that runs from the Caspian Sea through Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey, and across the Mediterranean up to Europe (Verhoeven, 2018: 247). The diversification is posited by the Commission in its Energy Union framework as well, to “decrease existing dependencies on individual suppliers” (EC, 2015: 19; see quote below):

To ensure the diversification in gas supplies, work on the Southern Gas Corridor must be intensified to enable Central Asian countries to export their gas to Europe (EC, 2015: 4)

10.7 Define problems: Fossil-bound authoritarianism

Like the jeopardized security order frame in section 10.4, the fossil-bound authoritarianism frame also considers the problem of Russia 'breaching international law' with its annexation of Crimea. The Union established guiding principles on EU-Russian relations against this backdrop while deploying sanctions in 2016 (Table 1; frame C). See the specifics in the pointed list below:

- Diplomatic sanctions: suspension of EU-Russia summits with indefinite effect;
 - Individual sanctions: travel bans/asset freezes on 146 persons and 37 organisations;
 - Sanctions against Crimea: a ban on trade and investment between EU and Crimea;
 - Economic sanctions, targeted at Russia's financial, defence and energy sectors.
- (EPRS, 2016: 2)

Given the annexation, 28 foreign EU ministers agreed on five guiding, reactive principles in handling Russia. Among these was the aspect of: “becoming more resilient to Russian threats such as energy security, hybrid threats, and disinformation” (coded as ‘Antagonistic Other’ (EPRS, 2016: 2; Table 1). Moreover, the EU’s need for resilience against Russian energy pressures/dominance is deemed problematic, coded as ‘Russian replaceability’.

10.8 Making moral judgments: Fossil-bound authoritarianism

With concern, this frame notes that Russia is “the EU’s leading supplier of fossil fuels, providing one third of its gas and oil imports” (EPRS, 2016: 4). Concerning ideology, the EU frames Kremlin’s threat as existential, relating it to security (coded as ‘securitization of energy security’). Here, the Kremlin uses “propaganda aggressively, not only to justify and divert attention away from its actions (for example, in Ukraine) but also to destabilize EU countries” (EPRS, 2016: 5).

Moreover, Russia’s actions in Aleppo, Syria (succeeding the annexation) encapsulate the EU’s antagonistic Othering of Russia, violating norms in Europe and beyond. Further, this frame highlights the tensions between the two ‘blocs’ stretching beyond energy relations:

The current confrontation in Syria reflects a wider ideological divide between Western support for the spread of democracy and Russian opposition to popular uprisings toppling authoritarian regimes. (EPRS, 2016: 7)

The illustration above signals the wider gap and incompatibility between the EU’s pro-Western democratization efforts, portraying Russia as an authoritarian counterpart and antagonist as its behavior is opposing the core objectives of Europe’s continental peace and democracy.

10.9 Suggest remedies: Fossil-bound authoritarianism

For suggested solutions, this frame sees extensive ‘decarbonization’ as liberating against fossil reliance and Russian authoritarian maneuvers (Frame C, Table 1). The environmental-ideational clash is best resolved by increasing ‘energy efficiency’ in the EU’s terms (coded the same): “The EU needs to speed up energy efficiency and decarbonization in the transport sector, its progressive switch to alternative fuels and the integration of the energy and transport systems” (EC, 2015: 21).

As for ‘renewables’ (Frame C, Table 1) being a component in multiple frames, they are explicitly advocated for in the May 2014 European Energy Security Strategy, as seen in these actions below prescribed to the Member States:

<p><u>Key actions</u></p> <p>Member States should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue the deployment of renewable energy sources in order to achieve the 2020 target in the context of a market-based approach;• Initiate the Europeanization of renewable energy support systems through improved coordination of national support schemes;• Accelerate fuel switch in the heating sector to renewable heating technologies;• Ensure stable national regulatory frameworks for renewables and address administrative barriers;• Facilitate access to finance for renewable projects on all levels (large and small scale) through a concerted initiative by the European Investment Bank and national investment banks, where relevant making use of the support provided by the ESI Funds;
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(EC, 2014: 13)

The key actions above emphasize ‘Europeanizing’ renewables through EU-wide investment schemes and countering administrative barriers by accelerating the switch to renewable fuels and technologies. This frame is highly adamant about diversifying hydrocarbon imports. Multiple examples illustrate how to move away from a single supplier. The problem with Russia’s offensive measures and intimidating tactics within (fossil) energy politics are effectively curbed through diversification in the short run. Besides the Southern Gas Corridor offering an alternative, the supply security aspects of intra-European ‘gas hubs’ are also considered, as shown below:

In Northern Europe, the establishment of liquid gas hubs with multiple suppliers is greatly enhancing supply security. This example should be followed in Central and Eastern Europe, and in the Mediterranean area, where a Mediterranean gas hub is in the making. (EC, 2015: 4)

Hence, this frame puts forth the clash between the EU’s environmental goals and ecological considerations as opposed to Russia’s fossil interests and authoritarian tactics nested in its way of asserting power and legitimacy.

10.10 Frame summary and findings

Frame A: <i>Commercial ties and sunk costs</i>
Main codes:
Commercial gains Cooperative Other Decarbonization Energy dependency Fossil reliance Natural gas Positive spillover Selective engagement Vulnerability interdependence
Frame B: <i>Jeopardized security order</i>
Main codes:
Breach of international law Decarbonization Diversification Emergency Energy Union mechanism Russian replaceability Securitization of energy security Southern Gas Corridor
Frame C: <i>Fossil-bound authoritarianism</i>
Main codes:
Antagonistic Other Breach of international law Cooperative Other Decarbonization Diversification Energy efficiency Fossil reliance Renewables Securitization of energy security Southern Gas Corridor

Table 1: A table of the three main frames (A/B/C) and their associated main codes (for a complete code list, see Appendix)

In sum, this analysis yielded three main frames summarized in Table 1 below: Commercial ties and sunk costs (A), Jeopardized security order (B) and Fossil-bound authoritarianism (C).

The first, commercial frame, concerns itself with economic ‘sunk costs’ having arisen from the EU becoming overly dependent on seemingly abundant natural gas (and other hydrocarbon) supplies provided by a previously conceived ‘Cooperative Russian Other’. A dilemma has arisen, rooted in the Union’s access to cheap and (thus far) ‘reliable’ energy through natural gas pipelines such as Nord Stream and Yamal (see Map 1). However, this previously cooperative perception came at the price of consolidating dependence on Russia, manifesting in unfair pricing schemes on hydrocarbons, resultatively making the Union more vulnerable.

Where the first frame concerns itself with commercial entrenchment and sunk costs of trade/economic exchange, the second, Jeopardized security order frame addresses the securitization of EU-Russian foreign policy relations (Frame B). The EU’s rhetoric was securitized immediately and urgently, due to its contractual partner (Russia) weaponizing energy. This differs from the fossil-bound authoritarianism frame, where the EU regards Russia an antagonistic irrational Other in the long-term, explained by their incompatible ideational-environmental perceptions. In this second frame, the EU went from trusting Russia to dismissing it as unreliable and as threatening the Union’s existence and independent functions by exercising energy leverage in a weaponized manner. Hence, this frame reflects a more immediate, emergency response to Russia’s threatening ways. This frame may seem like having a ‘gap’ since none of the material excerpts below precede the annexation date. Yet, Crimea’s annexation was arguably one of the pivotal moments in EU-Russian relations. Therefore, reflecting the proportions of measures taken in a changed, deteriorating security order in the Union.

The final, fossil-bound authoritarianism frame concerns an ideational-environmental aspect (Frame C, Table 1) which argues that Russia’s breach of international law (with Crimea’s annexation) represents an *Other* clashing with the EU on democracy ideals, ‘green’ energy politics and renewable transition strategies. This clash surpasses the material sphere, involving a normative dimension regarding self-conception, where European international democratic cooperation is opposed to Russian offensive, civilizational-driven authoritarianism (Siddi, 2020: 547; Laruelle, 2016: 62-64). Moreover, this clash can be connected to the Kremlin’s autocratic world order; a *Russkiy Mir* [Russian World], where Russia is one of the main (fossil)

superpowers, pitted against the EU, representing a liberal position of Western decadence and excessive minority liberties from the Kremlin’s perspective (Laruelle, 2016: 69).

Russia’s offense is framed as aggression toward the EU in the long term and on multiple dimensions, requiring strategic distancing from Russia. In the long run, the EU expresses desire to transition from fossil fuels to renewables because of its ideational and ecological discrepancies with the Kremlin. Specifically, this frame stretches beyond mere nationalism, delineating larger ‘civilizational’ clashes of incompatible ideas. In the fossil-bound authoritarianism frame, the 2014 Ukraine annexation becomes an ideological tug of war between a nationalist-expansionist Russian bloc with legitimacy struggles, pitted against an idealistic ‘liberal’ European project (Hofmann and Staeger, 2019: 334).

11. Discussion and further research suggestions

Frame overview: (Post-2014)	Commercial ties and sunk costs	Jeopardized security order	Fossil-bound authoritarianism
<i>Main problem with Russia</i>	A dilemma of cheap, reliable energy and pipeline expansion versus consolidating dependence: causing unfair pricing schemes on hydrocarbons	It is an unreliable and threatening partner	A long-term clash between EU’s ecological-climatic considerations and Russia’s economic interests
<i>Evaluation of the annexation</i>	Russia consolidated EU’s dependency on natural gas pipelines/hydrocarbon exports—making the Union vulnerable	Russia is explicitly aggressive; an Antagonistic Other	Europe is overly dependent on an authoritarian, fossil energy supplier
<i>Suggested response(s)</i>	Selective engagement, diversification of natural gas and investing in renewables	Energy Union and diversification of hydrocarbons through the Southern Gas Corridor	Increase the renewables share and diversify import sources of (non-renewable) hydrocarbons

Table 2: A summarized overview of the frames according to Entman’s four-framed setup and the three frames of commercial ties and sunk costs, the jeopardized security order and fossil-bound authoritarianism

Complex interdependence assisted by Siddi's Russian Other matrix yielded the frames above, with findings suggesting that the EU experienced notable change in its framing of Russia between 2011-2016. Mainly, in the policy field of energy security and partially in decarbonization (see summary in Table 2). Besides, each code within a frame/code group would either relate to frequency, the explicit mentioning of the topic/stakeholder, or an implicit reference (as exemplified in section 10.5).

If we then relate the findings above to the material, the **Commercial ties and sunk cost frame** (A, Table 1) implied that before Crimea's annexation, the EU perceived Russia as a 'Cooperative Other'—a mutually beneficial energy partner with the potential of cooperation trickling down to positive, 'democratized' political development (section 9.2).

In pre-annexation contexts, the 'energy dependency' code showcased that negotiating pipeline expansions (such as Nord Stream 2) was to the alleged benefit of both the EU and Russian bloc. However, as the Ukrainian conflict froze EU-Russian formal dialogues (Krushcheva and Maltby, 2016: 800), this commercial-collaborative pattern persevered across public-private partnerships. After all, the Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline project remained relevant after 2014, motivating 'vulnerability interdependence' and 'natural gas' codes along with the lopsided aspects of 'energy dependency' theme.

Together, these codes make up a framed dilemma which underpins the EU's resource reliance on Russian hydrocarbon exports. Adjustments appear costly, and Russia's 'asymmetrical' control over the pipelines seems inherently unfair to the Member States—given "Gazprom's abuse" (see 10.1; EPRS, 2016: 5). Hence, this outlines an energy policy shift from cooperation to conflict, driven by the EU's perceived vulnerability rather than mere Russian antagonism (Siddi, 2020: 547).

The first frame's vulnerability interdependence was reflected in the codes of 'selective engagement' (by limiting trade-related exchange with Russia) and 'renewables'—as the EU re-shifted its priority to *domestic*, renewable energy and pledged more ambitious renewable energy goals (section 10.4). Hence, this framing perspective illustrates an EU-wide adaptation of seeking out other alternatives and employing policy responsiveness, characteristic of vulnerability interdependence (Keohane and Nye, 2012; Güney and Korkmaz, 2014: 36). This aspect is illustrated more broadly in the jeopardized security order frame.

When relating the findings to the **Jeopardized security order frame** (B, Table 1), the annexation served as a reason for the Union to frame its energy policy as an urgent concern for the Union's existence as a political entity. The EU went from having good faith in Russia to

perceiving it as an unreliable contractual partner increasingly threatening the Union's *raison d'être*, relating to the code 'securitization of energy security'. Concretely, involving Russia weaponizing energy against the EU (section 10.5). Subsequently, the EU urges solidarity and unity in its energy policy actions to countermeasure Russia's threats.

After the annexation, however, the EU ended up facing precarity, as Russia could exercise leverage with its geopolitical and military might according to this frame. The findings were analyzed through a complex interdependence lens, assisted by Siddi's dichotomy. This analysis gave a securitized account alongside a deeper antagonistic Othering of Russia (as coded). When Crimea's annexation signaled a breach of international law, Russia was framed as undermining the normative landscape for energy politics in international law (section 10.4).

Besides, deeper preparedness and emergency thinking are adamantly referred to in the Union's policy communication, justifying the coding of 'securitization of energy security'. Given this new normality, Russia is unanimously framed as an actor needing replacement (coded as 'Russian replaceability'; Table 1). In short, the Union needs protection against the changing pressures exercised by the Federation.

Furthermore, the Union calls for an internal European Energy Market ('Energy Union Mechanism') to "improve the liquidity and resilience of the energy system" and stresses internal 'solidarity' and cooperation to further integration. Again, 'urgently' deploying language distinctive of securitization (EC, 2015: 5; EPRS, 2016: 5). This shift implies Russia being more central to both national (individual Member State's) identity likewise the macro-EU project, as outlined in Siddi's dichotomy-matrix. Russia finds itself in the lateral and horizontal antagonistic dimensions where "energy trade with Russia is not desirable. Russia is a political and security threat" (see Figure 1/Appendix). Similar motives incite the 'Southern Gas Corridor' solution code (section 10.6), where Azerbaijan and other Eurasian suppliers may be less intimidating or imminent for the EU's intermittent security premises, providing another option in safeguarding the Union's strained security urgently.

This second frame provides an explanation of the Union's unified shift as a supranational entity by framing its energy security policy as an existential danger inflicted upon the EU by Russia. Therefore, jointly perceiving Russia as an explicitly aggressive antagonist and norm violator after the annexation of Crimea (Table 2).

The final, **Fossil-bound authoritarianism frame** (C, Table 1) can be related and applied to the material findings before and after the annexation. Preceding the 2014 annexation, 'fossil reliance' was chosen as a diagnostic cause code because the European Commission asserted fossil fuels as an opportunity to integrate oil infrastructure and harmonize oil market

legislation between both parties. I.e., not considered problematic in contrast to after Crimea was annexed (section 9.3). Furthermore, Siddi's ideational dichotomy becomes the most evident in this frame, as pursuing deeper fossil relations with Russia has all the indicators for a 'Cooperative Other' relationship, because energy trade is deemed mutually beneficial and allows for fruitful energy policy outcomes (Figure 1/Appendix; Table 1).

However, from a parliamentary perspective, before the annexation, this frame's codes also frame Russia as an 'Antagonistic Other' when analyzed, as noted in the 2013 policy briefing (AFET, 2013; section 9.4). There is an apparent disjuncture in how the Commission communicates the EU-Russian energy relationship versus on the EU-parliamentary committee level. Moreover, the analysis highlights the incompatible ideational conceptions between EU and Russian environmental discourse and how to alter their energy mix (section 10.8).

After 2014, however, identity rifts (Siddi, 2020: 547; Figure 1/Appendix) and distrust towards Russia attain stronger hold in the EU, signifying an antagonistic shift in energy relations. As underlined in the analysis section 10.10, and eloquently expressed by Krushcheva and Maltby (2016: 802-803), the EU's "energy policy priority differences are linked to the opposing roles of energy producer and consumer" in EU-Russian identities, with the diversion of these identities exacerbating pre-existing differences, therefore providing "an obstacle to cooperation".

Hence, the following solutions and codes of 'decarbonization', 'renewables', and 'energy diversification' were chosen and applied in this frame (section 10.9). The EU increasingly expressed ambitions for a 'green' future and wanting to rid itself of fossil fuel dependency, which became materially and ideationally recognized as unsustainable for the Union's cooperative foundation long-term (EC, 2014: 13; EC 2015: 21).

Besides, domestic, and 'Europeanized' energy production tools and renewable strategies were outlined in several frameworks: the Commission's 2014 Energy Security framework, the 2015 Energy Union document, and EU-Russian 2016 guiding directions (section 10.9). Choosing the pursuit of 'energy efficiency' as a solution code for this frame is connected to it being integral for the Union's identity to have an "ambitious climate policy ... [giving] EU consumers - households and businesses - secure, sustainable, competitive and affordable energy" (EC, 2015: 2).

Furthermore, this frame resonates normatively with Siddi's dichotomy framework/Othering, since he builds the notion of the Russian Other around a conflictual EU-Russian relationship—arguing that there is a "fluid boundary" within European energy security

fora (2020: 546). Patterns of conflict or cooperation may also vary depending on Member States' preconceived notions and (economic) relationships with Russia (ibid).

As exemplified and motivated above, Russia's disinterest in reconsidering its hydrocarbon superpower role, nor its contentious tactics have a place in the EU's accelerated plans for a decarbonized energy transition (sections 9.4; 10.9; EC, 2015: 21). Besides, Russia's 'energy conservative' position is also relevant for the internal disputes over the Nord Stream 2 negotiations that followed the Crimean annexation (Siddi, 2020: 558).

Lastly, during the coding rounds, Russia's actions in Crimea were addressed more/less explicitly (i.e. in section 10.5). The risks and costs of engaging in diplomatic disputes with the Federation may have stifled concrete critique. Such results may outline the dilemmas in official policy lines or doctrines, implying that the EU must tread carefully in dependent relationships. By contrast, the statements made by elected lower-level EU-officials are affected by different power dynamics, while also generously alluding to the EU as a unified entity. Therefore, the varying outcomes of the frames connect to how various stakeholders view risk and appropriate political communication.

Concerning further research suggestions, in line with Entman's framing theory, this thesis' framing constructions can be generalized to wider discourse regarding the tactics deployed by the Kremlin during the 2022 invasion applied to Russia's contemporary energy narratives. Since the EU is ridding itself of Russian gas imports more urgently than ever (to avoid the dilemma of aiding war), further research could evaluate the now stalled Nord Stream 2 negotiations, the normative difficulties in enacting an oil embargo, or Russia's attempts to exercise leverage by stalling or threatening to upheave gas deliveries to vulnerable, more gas dependent EU-Member States. Ultimately, begging the question of whether the EU's increasingly framed Russian 'antagonism' in EU energy policy had any tangible impact. This thesis also omitted the specifics of the EU's climate ambitions, but further research could investigate the EU's recent RePowerEU 2022 framework and perhaps contrast this to Russia's energy discourse considering the Ukraine invasion.

Ergo, future research attempts could evaluate the Union's most recent energy policy frameworks and framing of Russia. Urgent transitions away from Russian hydrocarbons have increased notably due to the gas leverage/pressure exercised upon the EU Member States and should be investigated further.

12. Conclusion

There has been change in how the EU framed Russia in decarbonization and energy security policy areas before and after the annexation of Crimea in 2014. This change manifested through the securitized rhetoric in the Union's energy security strategies, mainly during 2014-2016 with the adoption of the Energy Union, hydrocarbon diversification initiatives and the EU's expression of solidarity and unison with vulnerable/gas dependent Member States.

This study investigated whether the EU framed Russia differently in the policy realms of decarbonization and energy security after Crimea was annexed in 2014. It did so by analyzing the frames of 'Commercial ties and sunk costs' (frame A), the 'Jeopardized security order' (frame B) and 'Fossil-bound authoritarianism' (frame C), dividing them into pre- and post-annexation compartments.

The main difference and change expressed itself as a normative-attitudinal migration in the codes, from perceiving Russia as a more Cooperative Other to almost exclusively framing it as an Antagonistic Other in the post-annexation frame segments.

The research question was answered by applying framing analysis onto EU-parliamentary policy briefings, EU-Commission frameworks and bilateral roadmaps between the EU and Russia spanning 2011-2016. These frames can teach us that the EU signified vulnerability through its multifaceted energy dependency with Russia—a relationship involving entrenched costs and commitments from both sides (as shown by frame A). Moreover, ideological rifts became increasingly apparent in navigating energy dialogues, which was noticeable in the highly prevalent frame C.

Moreover, one party, Russia, violated the contractual premises in these relations and simultaneously undermined Ukraine's sovereignty (a key energy transit state), therefore inciting a securitized, new energy paradigm—stimulating policy unison in the EU. This dimension was also highly prevalent throughout the later analysis, especially in frame B.

Importantly however, the decarbonization and renewables advocacy themes were not present to the same extent. The same concrete reasoning as in the security-laden frames/codes could not be discerned either, perhaps because security discourse (adamant in frame B) tends to concern state-to-state affairs and be more rigid in its connotations of security, risk, and safety.

The themes of hydrocarbon diversification and securitization were found to varying degrees in the three ABC-frames and were applied interchangeably. These findings reiterated

that the EU's framing of Russia changed in energy security and decarbonization policy on commercial (see frame A), security (B) and environmental-ideational (C) grounds. The analysis outcome thus points to a framing shift in the EU perceiving Russia as a Cooperative Other to an Antagonistic Other. All three frames signified that the EU ought to tread carefully with Russia to some extent, where undoing some or most of the economic-material ties may reap benefits. All in all, Crimea's annexation serves as a long-term culmination of cyclical crisis between Russia and Ukraine—which the EU as a neighboring entity internalized, as posited by the frames.

This research outcome should not be taken for fact since nothing is mono-causal. Crimea's annexation is likely not the only event that played into the developments the research addressed (see Limitations). Moreover, Russia's involvement in the Syrian war and the enactment of the Paris Agreement at COP21 in late 2015 were significant events succeeding Crimea's annexation—coinciding with some of the later policy documents' publication.

Conclusively, one cannot wholly isolate the relationship between the EU's changed framing of Russia in decarbonization and energy security areas by having the Crimean annexation as a determining factor (see Limitations). Yet, the EU's explicit and implicit framing of Russia as an Antagonistic Other by the EU increased tangibly after the 2014 annexation, driven by various concerns lifted in the three frames.

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14. Appendix

I. The Atlas.ti code list

Resource vulnerability and sunk costs (A)
Jeopardized security order (B)
Fossil-bound Russian offensive authoritarianism (C)
Codes present in multiple groups (A, B, C - A, C , B, C) are shaded in gray
Integral codes in the code groups which were actively used are marked in bold

Raw code list	Primary code groups
Antagonistic Other	A, B, C
Decarbonization	A, B, C
Diversification	A, B, C
Cooperative Other	A, C
Fossil reliance	A, C
Renewables (investments)	A, C
Russian Replaceability	A, C
Breach of international law	B, C
Southern Gas Corridor	B, C
Commercial gains	A
Energy dependency	A
Natural gas	A
Positive spillover	A
Selective engagement	A
Sensitivity dependence	A
Vulnerability dependence	A
Emergency	B
Energy Union mechanism	B
Securitization of energy security	B
Energy efficiency	C
Biomass	(A)
CCS	(A)
Continued dialogue	(A)
Oil	(A)
Energy security	(B)
Annexation response	
Domestic and supranational interests blurred	(in vivo code)
EU energy policy is guided by three principal objectives – sustainability, security of supply and competitiveness	(in vivo code)
EU unity has primacy	
Flexible GHG target	
Ideological divide	
Interdependence	
International climate action	

Low-carbon	
Mutual interdependence	
Nuclear	
Pan-European energy space	
Reciprocal energy relations	
Shah Deniz	
Social dimension	
Unconventional hydrocarbon production	
Vulnerability	

II. Siddi's Cooperation-Conflict Dichotomy Matrix (2020: 547)

