

HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

Masaryk University

Faculty

Faculty of Social Studies

Applicant

Mgr. Martin Jirušek, Ph.D.

Habilitation thesis

Energy supplies as a factor in international relations: policy approaches, and implications

Reviewer

prof. Alexander Duleba, CSc.

Reviewer's home unit, institution

Institute of Political Science, Faculty of Arts, University of Prešov

The compendium of publications with commentary submitted by Martin Jirušek as his habilitation thesis consists of six texts: four articles published in renowned, indexed scientific journals (no. 2 – East European Politics and Societies, 2018; no. 3 – Post-Soviet Affairs, 2017; no. 4 – Journal of Contemporary European Studies, 2024; no. 5 – Energy Policy, 2020), and two chapters in books published by the prestigious academic publisher Palgrave Macmillan (no. 1 in T. Vlček and M. Jirušek, 2019; and no. 6 in J. Holzer and M. Mareš, 2020). My role as a reviewer is made easier by the fact that all the texts successfully passed a rigorous review process. Given the strict editorial rules of the aforementioned journals and Palgrave Macmillan, the texts would not have been published if they did not represent an original contribution to the scientific knowledge of their respective topics. Most of the texts included in the habilitation compendium were written by Martin Jirušek in collaboration with colleagues from the Faculty of Social Studies at Masaryk University (T. Vlček – publications no. 1, 3, 4 and 6; P. Kuchyňková – publications no. 2 and 6) and the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies (J. Henderson – publications no. 3 and 4). As the reviewer of the habilitation compendium, I would like to emphasise that Martin Jirušek played a decisive role in designing the research for all publications included in the compendium.

Martin Jirušek's long-term research focuses on the weaponisation of energy supplies from Russia to countries in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, and how Russia has used these supplies to promote its geopolitical and economic interests from the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the USSR to the present day. This is primarily an effort by Russia to maintain its dominant position in the energy markets of former Eastern European and post-Soviet countries, using it to promote its own foreign and security policies in its relations with the West, and to maintain the political dependence of former communist countries. Martin Jirušek also demonstrates in his work that Russia's goal is to cast doubt on the democratic transitions and EU/NATO integration of former satellites. His research primarily focuses on the relations between these countries and Russia in the areas of natural gas, oil and nuclear energy supplies. In the texts included in the compendium, he offers an analysis of this agenda based on case studies of 18 countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia (mainly concerning natural gas and oil). The research also includes selected 'non-Eastern' countries for comparison with those under review: Greece (gas) and Finland (its approach to cooperating with Russia on the construction of new nuclear power plants, compared to

Hungary). This considerable number of case studies requires the processing of a large amount of data, clearly entitling the author to make comparisons, generalise findings, and formulate conclusions.

In my view, Martin Jirušek's most significant contribution to the body of scientific knowledge on the subject under investigation is the development of an original analytical model for identifying the weaponisation of supplies in the oil and natural gas sector, which relies on existing physical infrastructure. This ideal-type model is defined by a set of features and evidence of their manifestation (i.e. indicators). It is based on a strategic approach to energy policy and its theoretical foundations, such as classical realism, neorealism and classical geopolitics. The indicators also appropriately reflect the strategic state–market dichotomy in the field of energy security, which also mirrors the main dichotomy in the dispute between realism and liberalism in theoretical interpretations of international relations. An analytically sound and theoretically correct understanding of this dichotomy enables Martin Jirušek to define the concept of energy weaponisation as the intentional misuse of energy commodities as tools, an approach that corresponds with the realist perspective in international relations. I believe that successfully operationalising the theoretical (realist) framework for research (identifying the main features of each sector and the indicators that enable the detection of weaponisation within it) is Martin Jirušek's most significant contribution to scientific research on this topic. This has enabled him to make important findings and gain new insights. This is evidenced by the fact that texts applying the theoretical framework, and its successful operationalisation, have been published in prestigious scientific journals.

Martin Jirušek adapted the analytical model developed for the oil and gas sector to conduct research also into the weaponisation of supplies in the nuclear security sector (publication no. 4). This differs significantly in terms of the supply of technology, services and fuel, which are not directly dependent on physical infrastructure. In his commentary on the compendium, he points out that, even though the era of fossil fuels is slowly but surely coming to an end, Western countries are becoming increasingly dependent on rare mineral supplies, which are necessary for producing new technologies and ensuring future economic development. China currently controls most of the world's rare mineral resources and reserves, and, as Russia did in previous decades with oil and natural gas supplies, it may attempt to weaponize supply of these resources (as was evident in recent negotiations between the US and China on new trade tariffs proposed by the Trump administration). According to Jirušek, the model developed to identify Russia's weaponisation of oil and gas supplies could be adapted to study China's rare mineral supplies in the future. In any case, the degree to which it can be applied universally determines the quality of the scientific conceptualisation. Martin Jirušek and his colleagues at the Faculty of Social Studies at Masaryk University have developed an original and useful analytical model for measuring the weaponisation of strategic raw material supplies. This model is not only applicable to the 'old' energy dependencies of post-communist countries on Russia, but also to other areas of research.

I have three comments on the commentary that accompanies the author's compendium for habilitation. The first concerns the overall research design of the analytical model presented. As I mentioned previously, the operationalisation of indicators for each sector is successful and very useful for research purposes, and I have no issue with it. In the presented analytical model, the intermediate stage between the realistic theoretical framework and the indicators for detecting the weaponisation of supplies is represented by 'features determining supply security' for each sector (section 4, p. 25). However, I find the justification for these features based on the conceptualisation of energy security, or more specifically, the conceptualisation of energy supply security, lacking. In my opinion, the concept of the weaponisation of energy supplies, which is the central theme of the compendium, would be more comprehensive if it were incorporated into existing research on energy supply security, not only in the strategic approach to energy based on realistic interpretations.

My next comment concerns the overview of the relevant literature on the topic under study. I find that the overview lacks works by authors from the studied countries in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe. Regarding research into Russia's energy relations with these countries, apart from authors from Western countries, Martin Jirušek's commentary on the compendium primarily references works by Czech authors, apart from a piece by Hungarian author Anita Orbán (2008). There is no overview of works by authors from other studied countries who have researched their countries' relations with Russia in the field of energy supplies, including attempts at their weaponisation, over the past 30 years. Apart from mentioning the outputs of the Polish Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW), the author does not refer to any other sources. Relations with Russia have had a critical impact on the domestic policy (democratic transition) and foreign policy (integration into the EU/NATO) of all former post-communist countries. Russia's most effective tool for influencing their domestic and foreign policy is its relationship with them in the energy sector, particularly regarding energy supplies. This influence was the subject of internal political discourse and research in all the countries examined, and it would be worthwhile to map it and incorporate it into the author's own research, and vice versa.

Finally, my third comment concerns the different interpretation of the conclusions of publication No. 3 (Jirušek, Vlček & Henderson, 2017). In this publication, an analytical model was applied to examine the activities of Russian energy companies in Bulgaria and Greece. The article's conclusion (Post-Soviet Affairs, 33:5, pp. 335–355) states the following (p. 350): "...relatively little straightforward politically motivated conduct can be found, and the bulk of the operations of Russian state-owned oil companies in Greece and Bulgaria would instead seem to have been motivated by economic logic". At the same time, in a commentary on this publication in the habilitation compendium, the author states (p. 47): "It was found that Russian companies work hand-in-hand with their government to establish clout in the market, which is then used as and when required. Such behaviour also explains the occasional economic irrationality in the companies' behaviour, as it was usually conducted with a long-term goal in mind." Could the author please explain the apparent discrepancy between the interpretations of the findings in publication no. 3 and his commentary on this publication, which is included in the compendium?

During the defence of his habilitation thesis, I would ask the author to respond to the three comments above regarding the habilitation compendium presented. I would also be interested to hear the author's views on issues related to his current (and potentially future) research:

- 1) In the 1970s, the USSR became an important supplier of natural gas and oil to Europe, and not only to Eastern Bloc countries. For Western Europe (after the oil shock), supplies from the USSR served as a means of diversifying supplies or supplementing supplies from the Persian Gulf countries and were one of the factors contributing to the successful economic development of Western Europe over the past 50 years or so. Germany's long-standing 'pragmatic' approach (traditional *Ostpolitik*) to cooperation with Russia in the field of energy, apart from 'gratitude for the reunification of Germany', can also be explained by its interest in continuing supplies from Russia as one of the strategic factors of economic stability established after the oil shock of the 1970s. Crisis situations with supplies began to occur only after the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the USSR. Is the Russia-Ukraine war (since 2022), including the EU's decision to end Russian gas imports by the end of 2027, as well as the reduction in oil supplies from Russia as a result of sanctions, a milestone in Europe's 'energy' (and economic) history, closing the chapter that began with the oil crisis in the early 1970s? Is this view or assessment justified? Is this the beginning of a period in which Russia will definitively lose the ability to weaponize energy supplies to European countries? But what does this paradigm shift, which concludes a 50-year cycle of development, mean for Russia and what does it mean for Europe? I am interested in the author's opinion, first, whether it is possible to speak of a paradigm shift in Russia-Europe relations in the field of energy as

a result of the Russian-Ukrainian war, and second, if so, what are the most important consequences of this change for Russia, Europe, and the countries he focuses on in his research.

- 2) I was intrigued by the author's views on applying his analytical model to the increasingly relevant issue of Western countries' supply dependence on China for rare minerals important for producing new technologies. Which three features (determining supply security) would he propose to best serve the identification of indicators of China's weaponisation of supply?

Conclusion

The habilitation thesis entitled "Energy supplies as a factor in international relations: policy approaches, and implications" by Mgr. Martin Jirušek, Ph.D. **fulfils** requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of Political Science.

10th August 2025

