

## 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. Dr. Kacper Szulecki

#### Reviewer's home unit, institution

Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, Oslo  
Centre for Global Sustainability, University of Oslo

The work submitted by Dr. Jirušek, is a cumulative, article-based habilitation thesis, sitting on the frontier of International Relations (IR) and energy studies. It stands out for its sophisticated integration of these two, quite distinct fields, that do not often speak to each other and where different theoretical traditions and methodological approaches reign, leading to their parallel development. Typically, IR scholars adopt a more theory-dominated perspective, which is at times blind to the material realities of the energy sector, while energy studies, as an interdisciplinary field in which social sciences meet engineering and 'hard' science, lacks a coherent epistemological base and often produces fairly descriptive and non-nuanced analyses of energy politics.

Dr. Jirušek offers a rare and much-needed genuinely interdisciplinary perspective on the geopolitical role of energy, which is both sensitive to the technical specifics of the energy sector and has analytical, explanatory ambition. By grounding his analysis in IR Realist paradigms—classical, neorealist, and neoclassical realism—while simultaneously engaging with the technical and structural realities of the oil and gas sectors, the study bridges a critical gap between abstract political theory and the material dynamics of energy markets. This fusion is particularly important in understanding how state-owned enterprises, like those in Russia, can act as instruments of foreign policy, especially in regions like Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and South-Eastern Europe (SEE) where energy dependence and political vulnerability intersect. The result is a compelling framework that not only advances academic discourse but also equips policymakers with a clearer lens through which to assess strategic behaviour in global energy relations.

Making Russian energy companies the prime object of analysis, the author also engages with the vast area studies literature with its roots in “Sovietology” and current Eurasian studies. This, however, is not a study of Russian domestic politics; it looks at Russia from the outside, interested in what Russian actors do, how they behave abroad, and how they interfere (or not) in domestic policies of other countries. On the other hand, there is also an element of organizational thinking, with Russian energy companies treated as entities in their own right, whose behaviour does not have to be in line with the goals of the state, but who can, instead, act as rational economic/market actors. That is the key empirical problem the work of Dr. Jirušek addresses, and nuancing the unreflexive and automatic assumption that Russian companies are agents of the Russian state is a major contribution he has made to the field.

By constructing an ideal-type “model” grounded in Realist theory (developed in Publication 1 but expanded in the Introduction to the habilitation thesis), the author seeks to create an objective (or as close to objective as possible in the social sciences) tool for assessing whether Russian energy enterprises act as instruments of state power. The “model” has the form of a checklist, which identifies key indicators of energy weaponization, such as political conditionality, resistance to liberalization, and economically irrational conduct aimed at maintaining influence. These indicators are systematically researched across the case studies to assess the presence and extent of strategic behaviour. The use of clearly defined indicators provides a replicable framework for assessing behaviour of energy companies, making the research not only insightful but also methodologically transferable to other regions or sectors. Employing a bottom-up, idiographic case study approach, the author combines extensive fieldwork, semi-structured interviews, and triangulated data from official and investigative sources. This allows for a deeply contextualized understanding of each country’s energy landscape and its interactions with Russian actors.

The habilitation thesis is built around a series of case studies and analytical contributions that collectively examine the interaction between Russian energy actors and client states. The first Publication (1) is a theoretical chapter from a co-authored book that lays out, in detail, the author’s theoretical standpoint. Publications 2 and 3 offer an empirical investigation of the behaviour of Russian energy actors in CEE and SEE. This is logically complemented by Publication 6, which zooms in on the author’s native Czech Republic. Publication 4, in turn, expands the scope to cover the nuclear energy sector, often not analysed in terms of energy security, and with a broader, global scope of Russian foreign policy activities. Finally, Publication 5 reverses the perspective, and checks how the client states of the Visegrad Group in CEE view Russian infrastructure investments.

The internal dialogue between the Publications is also interesting. The comparative angle achieved through contrasting the oil, gas, and nuclear sectors enriches the thesis by highlighting sectoral differences and reinforcing the robustness of the analytical model. The research draws on a wide range of sources, including official documents, investigative journalism, and semi-structured interviews with local experts, ensuring empirical depth and triangulation. Together, the Publications form a cohesive and methodologically rigorous body of work that advances our understanding of how energy policy can serve as a tool of geopolitical influence and, more broadly, how energy policy intersects with geopolitics.

Overall, Dr. Jirušek's work stands out as a significant contribution to the fields of energy security, international relations, and regional studies. It bridges theoretical sophistication with empirical depth, offering both scholars and policymakers a powerful tool for understanding the geopolitical implications of energy dependence. The clarity of its analytical model, the depth of its case studies, and the relevance of its findings in today's geopolitical climate make it a landmark study in the analysis of energy as a tool of foreign policy.

#### **Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defense**

- 1) What is the theoretical status of the model developed in the initial parts of the thesis?  
You call it an ideal type, but what kind of knowledge does it allow us to generate?
- 2) You seek to “determine the presence of these approaches [state/market] in the conduct of actors under investigation” (p. 19). How can this be conclusively determined empirically, and how can we theoretically make sense of the fact that these two approaches can exist side by side?
- 3) Can you reflect more on the epistemological difficulties of empirically researching the intentions of actors, especially – collective actors?
- 4) A key theoretical difference between the Realist-rooted state-centric approach and the Liberal-market approach is that one treats the interests of actors as given, while the other sees them as emerging in interaction. What does your empirical research on the energy sector have to say about this distinction in reality, which seems to be capturing the way energy sector actors and states in energy politics act?

- 5) The research is particularly valuable for its focus on the SEE region, where historical ties, infrastructural dependencies, and political vulnerabilities make the area especially susceptible to energy weaponization, as well as Central Europe, which receives somewhat less attention than Western European countries. What does your perspective have to offer in terms of analyzing other regions, starting with Central Asia but also Western Europe?
- 6) The nuanced view of Russian energy companies as state-owned and yet independent, potential tools of foreign policy but also market actors, has been put to a tough test following the war in Ukraine and the more evident weaponization of energy resources. How have your views and conclusions evolved over the past three years in light of these geopolitical turbulences and shifts?

## Conclusion

The habilitation thesis entitled “Energy Supplies as a Factor in International Relations: Policy Approaches and Implications” by Mgr. Martin Jirušek, Ph.D. **fulfills** the requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of political science.

Date: 18 September 2025

Signature:

