

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. Margarita Balmaceda, Ph.D.

Reviewer's home unit, institution

Seton Hall University

1. Applicant's research focus

The cumulative habilitation *Energy Supplies as a Factor in International Relations: Policy Approaches and Implications* by Dr. Martin Jirušek investigates how energy supplies play a role as factor in international relations and, in particular, how energy may be misused (weaponized) to gain leverage over a partner (most likely a consumer). The primary empirical focus is on the Central and Eastern European region.

2. Format of the habilitation thesis

The work is presented as a cumulative habilitation composed of six reviewed publications (four of which in peer-reviewed journals): a co-authored book chapter with an additional author, a co-authored peer reviewed article with an additional author, two co-authored peer reviewed articles with two additional authors, a single-authored peer reviewed article, and a co-authored book chapter with two additional authors.

3. Evaluation of the content

The habilitation manuscript includes an introductory framing section, as well as the following six studies:

Study I [Vlček, T., & Jirušek, M. (2019). Research design. In T. Vlček & M. Jirušek, *Russian oil enterprises in Europe: Investments and regional influence* (pp. 23–51). Palgrave Macmillan] presents an analytical model that, with some adaptation, can be used for a wide set of cases.

Study II [Jirušek, M., & Kuchyňková, P. (2018). The conduct of Gazprom in Central and Eastern Europe: A tool of the Kremlin, or just an adaptable player? *East European Politics and Societies*, 32(4), 818–844.] analyzes Gazprom's behavior and the involvement of the Russian government in the natural gas sectors of the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Moldova, and Belarus.

Study III [Jirušek, M., Vlček, T., & Henderson, J. (2017). Russia's energy relations in Southeastern Europe: An analysis of motives in Bulgaria and Greece. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 33(5), 335–355.] discusses the interplay between commercial and political objectives in Russia's energy dealings with Bulgaria and Greece, examining how apparently market-driven actions by Russian state-owned companies may also serve as instruments of political influence.

Study IV [Jirušek, M., Vlček, T., & Henderson, J. (2024). Same but different: Rosatom as the Kremlin's upcoming leverage? *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 32(6), 1242–1258.] analyzes how Rosatom's nuclear projects in Finland and Hungary illustrate the unique risks of politicization in the nuclear sector, where—unlike fossil fuels—the leverage stems not from rigid infrastructure such as pipelines but from technological lock-in, financial dependence, and the frequent lack of transparency in contracts.

Study V [Jirušek, M. (2020). The attitude of the Visegrad Group countries towards Russian infrastructural projects in the gas sector. *Energy Policy*, 139, 111326.], focuses on the domestic determinants of attitude and reactions vis-a-vis specific large-scale Russian infrastructural projects and investments in the Visegrad states. In contrast to Studies II, III, IV and VI, this article shifts perspective from detecting “weaponisation” to mapping recipient-state positions and policies.

Study VI [Jirušek, M., Kuchyňková, P., & Vlček, T. (2020). Business as usual or geopolitical games? Russian activities in the energy sector of the Czech Republic. In J. Holzer & M. Mareš (Eds.), *Czech security dilemma: Russia as a friend or enemy?* (pp. 117–150). Palgrave Macmillan] analyzes Russian activities and investments in the Czech Republic's energy sector since 1989 by mapping Russian companies' presence, tracing key events and their public framing, and evaluating how Russian capital and company practices may influence Czech energy policy and security.

Taken as a whole, the publications argue that the level of energy supply weaponization—basically using energy as leverage over a customer state—can be ascertained through indicators such as direct involvement of the supplier's officials to back their companies abroad; strings attached to supply deals or prices that hinge on the buyer's foreign-policy posture; deliberate tinkering with infrastructure such as pipelines or differential pricing; efforts to control key assets and lock in a dominant market position by resisting liberalization and favoring one-to-one deals; and even seemingly irrational moves aimed at holding market share or securing longer-term political gains. In practice, how far Russia can implement such measures will depend on the local context. While such framing generally makes sense, one factor that could have received more attention concerns the interface between level of control and EU regulations and how they may support—or not—resilience vis-a-vis Russian energy weaponization.

All the publications submitted as part of the commutative habilitation present a strong evidentiary basis. Although they deal with different types of energy and different states, they generally exhibit a synergistic approach focused on the behavior of Russian energy companies in Central and Eastern Europe.

While the cumulative habilitation is grounded in a coherent theoretical framework and a common analytical model, the methodological application varies across the included articles and chapters according to the specific needs of the topic under study. This is especially the case considering the fact that the case studies included in the articles and chapters presented as part of the commutative habilitation cover a broad array of countries: Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, and Slovakia, although analyzed at different levels of detail depending on the publication involved and its focus. Throughout the publications, the research goal for each determines the method. In some cases, the emphasis lies on refining and presenting the analytical model itself (as in Study I), while in others the focus shifts toward empirical testing through in-depth case studies in the oil, gas, or nuclear sectors. Depending on sectoral characteristics and available evidence, the author adapts data sources and techniques: for example, drawing more heavily on contract analysis and infrastructure data in the gas sector, or highlighting financing in the nuclear sector. Similarly, selected studies complement these with semi-structured interviews or comparative regional perspectives.

Given the fact that most of the publications submitted as part of this cumulative dissertation were co-authored with one or two additional authors come on there are limitations to the ways in which the author's analytical framework can be explicitly made the basis of the analysis in each of these. The author, however, does that in a thorough manner in the introductory section to the habilitation manuscript itself.

All in all, the cumulative profile presented by Dr. Jirušek as part of his habilitation procedure—peer-reviewed output, conceptual clarity, and successful integration of various case studies—makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the behavior of Russian energy companies in Central and Eastern Europe. In particular, two important contributions concern the incorporation of nuclear power in a field of analysis often dominated by natural gas and oil and the sophisticated and nuanced theoretical framing for the habilitation as a whole. This cumulative profile also highlights Dr. Jirušek's breadth and depth of knowledge of the energy landscape across the entire EU, Southeastern Europe and Russia, and his nuanced understanding of and contribution to International Relations theory and research.

4. Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence

Question 1: Most of the case studies discussed the articles and chapters included in the cumulative habilitation deal with examples from the period before or around 2022. How do you see the means of Russian influence through energy after 2022 changing? Are there any channels for Russian energy influence to continue, leaving aside the most obvious cases of Czech Hungary and Slovakia?

Question 2: In the post-2022 period, are we observing a situation where the same methods that were used vis-à-vis EU and non-EU Balkan and Southeastern European states before continue to be used, but now towards other states?

Question 3: The analysis of nuclear power and investments in your 2024 article co-authored with Tomas Vlček and James Henderson is highly interesting as it highlights the importance of the host country's regulatory and political environment in dealing with Russian influence through Rosatom. How do you see this set of issues developing given current trends in EU governance and concerning the delimitation of competencies and policy-making power between the EU ("Brussels") and member states?

Question 4: Do you see your approach (as presented in particular in the introductory text to the habilitation) as applicable to other countries or economic areas? In particular do you see any parts of your approach shedding light on US or Chinese behavior in the last three years?

5. 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.

Date: September 26, 2025 Signature:

