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THE ENERGY UNION AND VISEGRAD FOUR COOPERATION

The following article argues that energy security is an extremely important challenge for the countries of the European Union. Economically and democratically weakly-developed countries hold a constant fight, both open and hidden, for preserving and enforcing their energy influence in the world. Russia is the most vivid of such examples. Considering the events in the East of Ukraine, its closest European neighbours – countries of the Visegrad Four Group - should unite their efforts together and re-think their energy policies in terms of security and diversification. Establishing the EU Energy Union might be a solution.

Key words: the European Union, the Visegrad countries, energy, Russia, diversification.

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ЕНЕРГЕТИЧНИЙ СОЮЗ І СПІВПРАЦЯ ВИШЕГРАДСЬКОЇ ЧЕТВІРКИ

Відзначається, що безпека в енергетичній сфері - надзвичайно актуальний виклик для країн Євросоюзу. Економічно й демократично нерозвинені країни ведуть постійну боротьбу, як відкрити, так і приховати, для збереження і нав'язування їх енергетичного впливу у світі. Росія є найяскравішим з таких прикладів. Розглядаючи події на Сході України, найближчі сусіди з Європи - Група Вишеградської Четвірки - повинні об'єднати свої зусилля і переглянути поточну політику в області енергетики відносно безпеки і диверсифікації. Створення Енергетичного Союзу ЄС є можливим рішенням.

Ключові слова: Європейський Союз, країни Вишеградської Четвірки, енергетика, Росія, диверсифікація.

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ЭНЕРГЕТИЧЕСКИЙ СОЮЗ И СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВО ВЫШЕГРАДСКОЙ ЧЕТВЕРКИ

Отмечается, что безопасность в энергетической сфере – чрезвычайно актуальный вызов для стран Евросоюза. Экономически и демократически неразвитые страны ведут постоянную борьбу, как открытую, так и скрытую, для сохранения и навязывания их энергетического влияния в мире. Россия является самым ярким из таких примеров. Рассматривая события на Востоке Украины, ее самые близкие соседи из Европы – Группа Вышеградской Четверки - должны объединить свои усилия и пересмотреть текущую политику в области энергии относительно безопасности и диверсификации. Создание Энергетического Союза ЕС является возможным решением.

Ключевые слова: Европейский Союз, страны Вышеградской Четверки, энергетика, Россия, диверсификация.

The question of energy security is an extremely important factor for any country. First of all, this includes the so called energy independence. While reviewing the countries of Europe, in the vast majority of cases these are countries-consumers of energy sources, with a negative energy balance. It means that complete energy independence is not a possibility for those countries. Thus, energy independence is ensured – to a possible degree – by other factors that could be actually controlled by the consumer-countries themselves: organizational measures (establishment of unions and associations), political pressure on possible sources of threat (usually, upon energy-donor countries), obtaining control over energy supply companies in donor countries, supporting and stimulating loyal governments in donor countries, creating financial dependence of donor countries, and sometimes, even military intervention.

On their behalf, donor countries – which are mostly economically weakly-developed countries – wage constant fight (open and hidden) for preserving and enforcing their „energy” influence in the world. From the first glance, it seems that the methods used by those donor-countries are the same as those of energy-consumer states. However, due to questionable „civility” of many donor-countries, those methods acquire a very

aggressive and dangerous character. There could emerge local wars, centres of tension and frozen conflicts are created, political overturns are organized, terrorism is being supported and financed. Such actions infringe energy security of energy-consumer states, making them hostages of someone’s specific interests and bringing wars and tragedies to the peaceful citizens.

When we look upon the states of affairs in the European Union, the picture is the following: united and prosperous Europe, after the fall of socialistic camp, acquired new members, and together with them – new challenges. For the past 25 years the majority of those challenges were more or less successfully solved, countries of Eastern Europe and the Balkans are positively developing their economies and democracies. However, when in 2013 Ukraine declared its desire to join the European Union, the question of energy security for Europe re-emerged with a new force. Russia did not want to lose Ukraine out of its sphere of influence, as among other factors this would mean for the former the limitation of its donor pressure (and sometimes blackmail) upon Europe. Combined with military-political motives of Russia towards Ukraine, we get a set of reasons leading to Crimea annexation and military conflict in the East of Ukraine.

One could note that the conflict of consumer-donor of energy resources in Europe dates back to 1990ties and grew with the strengthening of Russia. After the crisis of Russian gas supply through Ukraine in 2004 and 2009 it became evident that Europe should really take care about its energy independence. The Visegrad countries and the countries of the South-Eastern Europe found themselves in the most vulnerable position. As a heritage from recent past – socialistic camp – those countries received a strong dependency from Russia in technological, as well as in partially political sphere. But then, no tangible losses were endured. V4 countries demonstrated their unity, adherence to democratic values and solidarity with the rest of Europe.

The year of 2005 marked a real process of the EU unification against energy aggression of Russia – the EU concluded an agreement with South East Europe Energy Community to „align the *South East Europe* and Black Sea Region with the EU's internal *energy* market” [1]. In 2011 the Community was joined by Ukraine as well.

As a vivid example of active resistance of the European community to energy aggression of Kremlin, we can refer to the antitrust investigation of the European Commission against „Gazprom”, started in September 2012. The European Union is ready to level an accusation against „Gazpro.m” for anti-competition activities, which could lead to the fine in the amount of 15 billion US dollars.

Those processes were somewhat „encouraged” by the events in Crimea and the East of Ukraine, which in their turn had been initiated by Moscow. Utterly aggressive and deceitful policy of Russia, accompanied by an unprecedented information war (as an important element of a hybrid war), opened to the vast public aggressive, anti-human and cynical goals of Russia's leaders, including the sphere of energy. Gas and oil became weapons in the hands of Russia.

Thus, the events in Ukraine, as partially a result of the above mentioned contradictions between the super-players on the energy market – Russia and the European Union – simultaneously became the reason of a deep crisis in the interaction of those players, and firstly, in the sphere of energy. In such a situation, when their political and energy prosperity is endangered, the countries of Europe show unity regarding the events in Ukraine, as political and economic sanctions are applied towards Russia. Yet, not everything is

as smooth as it could be, considering the overall sharpness of the situation.

In some European countries, particularly in some V4 countries, there are powers that due to various reasons do not seek strong measures towards Moscow. For a big part, such a situation is caused by a full-scale information war and propaganda, tremendously fed by Russia in those specific countries. As a result, there is not a sharp, yet a split within the Visegrad countries. If Poland consistently supports the European aspirations of Ukraine and openly criticises the actions of Russia, including its energy aggression, the governments of Hungary and Slovakia, in some questions, are leaning towards a pro-Russian position. Nevertheless, facing a real threat of energy security, V4 countries managed to agree upon the key issues, including Ukraine and gas security, also supporting the perspective of the EU and NATO expansion. A big success in enforcing the unity of the EU countries, and in supporting their energy security, as well as energy security of Ukraine, was shown by reverse-flow gas deliveries to the latter from V4 countries.

In spring 2015 leaders of the European countries made another important step to ensure energy security of Europe, thus proving their consistency and willingness to support the energy security policy. It was announced about the creation of the EU Energy Union. The Energy Union will „diversify Europe's sources of energy and make better, more efficient use of energy produced within the EU”, „reduce the EU's need for energy imports”, „renew the European emissions trading scheme, pushing for a global deal for climate change in Paris in December 2015, and encourage private investment in new infrastructure and technologies”, support „breakthroughs in low-carbon technologies by coordinating research and helping to finance projects in partnership with the private sector” [2].

It is also announced about the profound diversification of oil and gas supply on the European market. Russia stops being a strategic partner of the EU. EU Climate Action and Energy Commissioner Miguel Arias Caete stated that „Europe's oil dependence is double what the US's was just before the 1979 oil crisis. For gas, we import a third of what we use from Russia. And the **current crisis in Ukraine** has shown just how vulnerable this dependence makes us. When it comes to energy, don't put your fate in the hand of autocratic regimes” [3].

In its own turn, Ukraine is demonstrating its willingness to be a valid participant of the

current process, interested in gaining energy stability and security. „Naftogaz” has reminded the EU about the advantages of a Ukrainian gas pipeline which could help the European Union to partially compensate its refusal from the Russian „South Stream”. Ukraine has offered to Europe its gas transmission network. This active usage of Ukraine’s gas transportation system will allow the countries of South East Europe to increase the level of their energy security despite the refusal to build „South Stream”, claims “Naftogaz Ukraine”. „We welcome the creation of a working group on behalf of the South-Eastern Europe countries, with the participation of European *Commission* Vice President *Maroš Ševčovič*. Within this working group, we would elaborate the plan of markets’ integration and the construction of interconnectors for Central and Eastern Europe. Ukraine has vast potential for gas storage and supply that is necessary to improve the current situation, and we are happy to make our input”, said the head of „Naftogaz” Andrej Kobalev [4].

Regarding the Visegrad countries, the latest summit in Bratislava demonstrated some tangible progress in overcoming the inner crisis and proving the will to continue the united European path. V4 diplomats expressed their full solidarity with Ukraine in protecting its territorial integrity and sovereignty, and confirmed their readiness to participate in concrete directions of reforms in Ukraine. For example, Slovakia will be responsible for the reforms in the sphere of energy and security in Ukraine.

Summarizing all the above mentioned, it becomes evident that the European Union, for

the bigger part, managed to overcome all the indecisiveness and hesitance that had been recently present in its inner dialogue. Europe is on the way of creating a new and more effective system of energy security not only for itself, but for its neighbours and partners. The Visegrad courtiers, in particular, are among the first to benefit from those new policies. Thus, V4 leaders should not only support the creation of the Energy Union as a system of collective energy security, but put all their efforts to become its most active participants. Deliberate policies in energy sector would provide for the prosperous future of Visegrad countries and their neighbours.

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