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The geopolitics of Russian gas pipelines in Europe. Between energy realism and liberalism

Abstract

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 intensified the conflict that began in 2014, raising concerns regarding Europe's energy security due to its dependence on Russian natural gas. Three of the four pipelines supplying Russian gas to Europe were of particular concern: Nord Stream (1 and 2), Yamal-Europe and the Ukrainian Transmission System, piping gas to Germany, Poland and Ukraine, respectively.

This article analyses Russia's relations with these countries from the perspectives of realism and liberalism, examining how both theories interpret energy geopolitics. While Poland and Ukraine treat Russian gas from the perspective of offensive realism and view their dependence as a strategic vulnerability, Germany has traditionally adopted the stance of institutional liberalism, and perceives gas as a commercial good that promotes stability.

The facts shed light on the differences in perceptions of natural gas, pipelines and the relationship with Russia, as well as national energy strategies, and how these differences did not prevent the disruption of gas supplies, with offensive realism emerging as the dominant interpretative approach. This has led to a new pipeline map and a new policy towards Russia.

Keywords

Energy insecurity, Natural gas, Ukraine war, Economy, National security.

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1 Introduction

In 2022, the Russian Federation carried out a full-scale invasion of several regions of Ukraine, marking a significant escalation of the conflict that had begun in 2014. One of the immediate concerns was a potential energy insecurity in Europe due to a possible shortage of Russian natural gas. This fear was based on the combination of two facts: Europe's traditional dependence on Russian gas supplies (around 40%) and Russia's previous track record of using natural gas as a political tool, as perceived by some importing countries in Europe. Concerns about an eventual decline or disruption were especially high regarding gas flows through three of the four pipelines transporting gas from Russia to Europe: the Ukraine gas pipeline system[1], the Yamal-Europe pipeline and the Nord Stream pipeline system.

Given the uncertainty over European energy security and the ongoing war in Ukraine, the EU drafted the RePowerEU Plan (European Commission, 2022a) with the intention of finding natural gas to progressively replace Russian gas and stop importing it by 2027.

Their suspicions became reality when the Yamal and Nord Stream pipelines stopped transporting gas in April and September 2022, respectively. In turn, Ukraine's gas pipeline system brought Russian gas to Europe in minimal quantities, however, the contract between the two countries expired on the 31st of December 2024, and there is no prospect of renewal, at least for the time being.

Since the outbreak of the war, there has been a steady flow of studies and analyses on the energy situation resulting from the invasion, focusing mainly on the consequences of the interruption of Russian supply (Aitken and Ersoy, 2023; Henderson and Chyong, 2023; McWilliams *et al.*, 2023; Selei *et al.*, 2022) and on the paradigm shift caused by the energy crisis in the EU (Kuzemko *et al.*, 2022; Mišík and Nosko, 2023; Osička and Černoch, 2022).

The aim of this article is to understand Russia's relations with Ukraine, Poland and Germany in terms of the gas piped through the Ukrainian, Yamal and Nord Stream pipelines by framing them within two theoretical currents in international relations: offensive realism and institutional liberalism. Through them, whether the aforesaid realist and liberal conceptions of natural gas have influenced the situation brought about by the war in Ukraine will be explored.

Poland, Ukraine and Germany have been chosen for this analysis due to their geopolitical relevance, and it is believed that this choice will illustrate how historical, economic and geopolitical factors condition diverging energy strategies within the same regional framework.

1 The term "Ukrainian gas pipeline system" refers to the network of pipelines originating in Russia and running through Ukraine. The Amistad and Soyu pipelines and their branches are therefore grouped under this heading.

The first part of the article outlines the characteristics of the theories of offensive realism and institutional liberalism. It identifies the features that are essential to understanding the relations between the above European countries and Russia, and their transfer to the scenario of the relationships developed around the different gas pipelines. One of the main results is the identification of what has been called "energy realism" and "energy liberalism".

In the second part, after presenting each theoretical framework, the current status of the gas flows through the aforesaid pipelines is discussed, explaining the conditioning factors.

It is concluded that the reception of Russian gas via the Nord Stream, Yamal and the Ukrainian transit system pipelines has been interpreted very differently by Germany, Poland and Ukraine. These diverging perceptions of the energy relationship with Russia have led to different concepts of energy security and different national strategies. At the same time, the difference in the perceptions of Russia as a supplier has not prevented the experienced energy crisis after the escalation of the war that began in 2022.

The study seeks to innovate in two ways: from a theoretical perspective, considering the premises of institutional liberalism and offensive realism in the area of energy, and from a concrete and applied dimension, contributing the theoretical conclusions derived from the study of the aforementioned cases for the assessment and design of European Union (EU) security policies.

2 Gas pipelines and geopolitics: an interpretation based on the theories of realism and liberalism

Energy is very often present in international relations. In this regard, Energy Commissioner Andris Piebalgs stated in 2006: "We have seen that the issue of energy supply security has become an international relations issue".

Given the relationship between both spheres, two of the most important theories in international relations are applied to the energy scenario: realism and liberalism, aware that there are currents and interpretations that coexist within both realism (classical realism, structural realism or neorealism, defensive realism, offensive realism, neoclassical realism) and liberalism (commercial liberalism, democratic peace or neoliberal institutionalism).

The validity and usefulness of these theories are not, however, free from detractors or critics who consider the arguments that pit State and market against each other to be limited, for considering that they emphasize power politics and strategic interactions between states (Judge and Maltby, 2016), or for not including non-State actors and multiple political scales in their approach (Stoddard, 2013).

It is also true that there are limitations to the application of theories, as it is difficult for a scenario to be fully identified with a theoretical discourse. This study will use the currents of institutional liberalism and offensive realism; both present ideal models that serve to classify similar policies, but it is difficult for them to display an absolute pattern of countries' actions. These are ideal models and not clearly established paradigms (Wilson, 2019).

In any case, both theories remain valuable tools for analysing and understanding complex scenarios such as the pipeline map from Russia to Europe.

2.1 Institutional liberalism and energy

The ideas underpinning liberalism have their roots in the 18th century[2] and are based on the links between freedom of trade and the peaceful behaviour of states. This theory considers open markets and economic interdependence to be effective means of pacifying governments' external behaviour; the existence of a network of common trade interests discourages war as a means for a State to increase its power (Doyle, 1986).

Institutional liberalism has its philosophical roots in this 18th century Enlightenment thinking and the ideas of cooperation and universal rights championed by thinkers such as Immanuel Kant and John Locke. As a formal theory in international relations, it emerged in the 1970s and was consolidated in the 1980s, especially through the work of Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye (1977). Their joint publication *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* redefines international relations by including economic and transnational factors as key to inter-State cooperation. Keohane (1984) subsequently develops these dynamics further by exposing how international institutions foster cooperation even without hegemonic power.

Some of the most relevant postulates are as follows: there are transnational relations between private actors, not only between states, which deepen their interdependence; defence issues are not a priority in international relations; and the probability of the use of force between two states decreases as their interdependence increases. Within the field of energy, "economic interdependence can foster peace and cooperation, as states become more reluctant to disrupt relationships that benefit their mutual prosperity" (Saaida, 2024).

Economic exchanges promote communication and understanding between states, which fosters cooperation. In turn, economic actors put pressure on their respective governments to maintain this cooperative relationship, deterring hostile actions (Jordan, 2013).

2 The ideas on which commercial liberalism and complex interdependence are based are deemed to have originated in *The Spirit of Laws* (Montesquieu, 1748) and, later, in *An Inquiry into the Nature and Cause of the Wealth of Nations* (Smith, 1776).

Furthermore, institutional liberalism recognises the importance of international regimes, understood as sets of principles, norms, rules and procedures that guide the behaviour of actors in specific areas of international relations. These regimes facilitate cooperation by providing structured frameworks that reduce uncertainty and promote shared expectations among states (Krasner, 1983). It also highlights the relevance of democracy and human rights as foundations for lasting peace, arguing that democracies tend to have more peaceful and cooperative relations with each other (Doyle, 1986).

Finally, institutional liberalism stresses the ability of institutions to adapt and evolve in the face of changes in the international environment, enabling them to continue to effectively promote global cooperation and stability (Barbé, 1989).

How liberalism understands energy relations may be deduced from the meaning it gives to natural gas, the relationship around energy resources and pipelines. Natural gas, from this perspective, is a commercial good and, as such, the object of sale and purchase. Commercial relations are generated and developed around it, subject to the trade rules that regulate and define them.

The second key aspect is the relationship between countries with regard to natural gas. The energy resource here is the object of a relationship characterised not by dependence, but by interdependence, based on the reciprocal interest of both parties (buyer and seller) in maintaining this commercial transaction: the State that acquires the natural gas has the same interest in supplying itself as does the producing/exporting country (and, where appropriate, the transit country) in selling and profiting from it.

Interdependence within the framework of institutional liberalism implies a relationship of mutual dependence in which the actions of one State directly affect others, creating incentives for continued cooperation. Applied to energy, this interdependence manifests itself in the relationship between natural gas exporting and importing countries: the former depend on sales to sustain their economies, while the latter require a secure supply to maintain their productive systems. This connection encourages cooperative behaviour, as any interruption in the flow would be detrimental to both parties. Moreover, energy interdependence is not symmetrical; some states are more vulnerable than others depending on their diversification of sources and suppliers, which can lead to complex negotiations and the creation of institutional frameworks to minimise risks and ensure a stable and predictable supply (Nye and Keohane, 1977).

Gas pipelines are interpreted in this perspective as facilitating said cooperation and representing the common interest.

All three elements affect how energy security is understood, which is in turn determined by aspects such as the global demand outlook, price volatility or the real capacity of producer countries to supply the energy required, also conditioned, for example, by available investments. Energy security depends on competitive and open markets, therefore energy insecurity issues are addressed through supply and demand and prices (Harris and Naughten, 2007); for this reason, actions to ensure energy supply include facilitating trade and investment. The reciprocal benefit of the

natural gas transaction between states would be conducive to interdependence and cooperation. Consequently, international markets would function as a "global public good", improving the energy security of all economies, providing a strong incentive for governments to take collective action to support and increase these markets (Wilson, 2019). Energy security thus takes on a "market-based" meaning (Chester, 2009), depending on the latter's proper functioning.

From another perspective, interdependence also affects energy security because very few states possess the full range of energy assets that their economies require (Nance and Boettcher, 2017).

Energy security is therefore embedded in economics and industry. These perceptions of natural gas, the interdependence relationship, pipelines and energy security would define what may be termed institutional liberalism in energy relations or institutional energy liberalism.

While institutional liberalism argues that economic interdependence reduces the likelihood of conflict by creating incentives for cooperation, it does not guarantee the total absence of tension or breakdown in international relations. Interdependence entails potential costs in case of disruption of relations, but these costs may be borne for political, strategic or national security reasons. According to Keohane and Nye (1977), states are rational actors seeking to maximise their interests in an environment of complex interdependence, but they also face security dilemmas and are subject to pressure from internal and external factors that may lead to decisions that run counter to cooperative logic. Indeed, other authors point out that interdependence can generate strategic weaknesses, which may motivate states to diversify their relations or to confront their trading partners if they perceive threats to their security or sovereignty. Therefore, interdependence does not eliminate conflict, but shapes the way in which states manage their interests in an interconnected global context (Ripsman *et al.*, 2016; Rose, 1998).

In addition to this critique, there are other challenges to the application of liberal theory to energy relations. For example, "liberal theory may underestimate how competition for strategic energy resources can lead to conflict or how energy dependence can be used as a tool for political influence"(Singh, 2019).

Additionally, liberal theory has been criticised for its tendency to rationalise the political agenda, which may limit its ability to address the complexity of international energy relations (Reus-Smit, 2001).

2.2 Offensive realism and its embodiment in energy

Within the context of international relations, the theory of realism is one of the most recurring theories for understanding power dynamics between states. It has its precedents in Sun Tzu, Machiavelli or Hobbes, one of its main premises being that the State is the main actor and develops in a context of international anarchy where there

is no central authority to regulate relations with other states or between them (Tariq *et al.*, 2018).

In offensive realism, the national interest is the overriding variable (Riaz *et al.*, 2021) and both military and economic power are essential to achieving these national interests and shaping the anarchic political system (Walt, 2017). There is a relationship between security and power, and in turn, the pursuit of power is a cause of war and conflict. Strategies such as power maximisation, international alliances, arms races and diplomacy are seen as means for states to increase their security (Walt, 2017). At the same time, this current perceives State insecurity as the main problem in international relations, leading to a system of self-help in which states must provide for their own security in the absence of a higher authority.

The combination of group primacy, selfishness and anarchy means that international relations are marked by the quest for power and security (Wohlforth, 2010).

When applied to energy, this realism entails discerning how three of its constituent elements are understood: the energy resource, the energy relationship and the pipelines.

Here, natural gas is a strategic resource that goes beyond its mere status as a commodity. States consider it not only as an economic resource but also as a source of power that may be used in aid of foreign policy action. It constitutes yet another instrument to achieve goals, a strategic tool that states may use to compete for political supremacy in the international arena (Szulecki *et al.*, 2018).

The perception of natural gas has an impact on how the relationship between exporting and consuming countries is understood:

> "Dependence on foreign producers is a risk to energy supply, a potential threat to security. Conversely, for producer states, the enormous economic importance of energy makes it an important coercive asset in a state's foreign policy arsenal. This can include using gas as an energy weapon (where supplies are withheld as a threat) or energy diplomacy (where preferential treatment is offered as an incentive)" (Szulecki *et al.*, 2018).

For states seeking to maximise their power and security in this anarchic international system, energy is a crucial strategic resource for survival and power (Lawson and Usiemure, 2018). So much so that energy is considered a central element of power, foreign and security policy.

Potential international cooperation for energy is perceived by realists as a means to promote national and security interests, rather than as an end in itself (Bovan *et al.*, 2020; Saligin, 2014). These energy relations are perceived differently if the realist nation is an importer or an exporter of energy resources. In the first case, energy security emphasises energy autonomy and independence (Karunathilake *et al.*, 2022), and focuses on competition for energy resources. This competition for resources and pursuit of energy autonomy would be motivated not only by domestic concerns for survival and economic growth, but would also be justified

by the belief that states view energy as a strategic resource that tends to be used as leverage to achieve political goals. It would be a defensive strategy in the belief or possibility that states seek "to obtain as much relative power as possible to increase their security, and one of the most important forms of power is energy" (Mearsheimer, 2003).

Realist nations with energy resources which export them would seek to create dependencies that they can use for their own national interests. These countries seek to "employ control of energy resources as a means of influencing other states and strengthening their own position in the international system" (Waltz, 1979).

The belief that the producer country could interrupt gas supplies to the consumer country for political purposes assumes that the former can bear the losses from unrealised gas sales. This means that there is no interdependence but dependence (or asymmetric interdependence). In the absence of interdependence, the deterrent to the use of gas as a political weapon disappears, and the risk of this possibility means that dependence is understood as a weakness. Pipelines would then be merely the instruments available to governments seeking to exploit their energy reserves to further political objectives.

As a consequence of these perceptions, energy security would be placed within national security, the two being inseparable. Indeed, from this perspective of offensive realism, natural gas —and energy in general— may be interpreted as a means to achieve supremacy in the international system, as a key tool to accumulate power in an anarchic international system. States, motivated by the need to maximise their power, seek to control these resources, considering them geopolitical elements rather than mere economic assets. Additionally, controlling energy resources allows states to achieve regional hegemony, consolidating their supremacy and decreasing their vulnerability to potential threats (Henderson and Mitrova, 2016; Kuzemko, 2013; Mearsheimer, 2003).

Trade in strategic resources is strictly determined by national interests, and concerns for power and survival in the international system are prioritised. Cooperation thus seems meaningless given the chaotic nature of the international context.

In short, offensive realism provides a framework for understanding energy security as an extension of power politics, whereby states act to ensure their survival and position in the international system. Energy security becomes a critical aspect of State strategy, as energy resources are essential to a state's power and influence (Kilinç-Pala, 2021; Mohapatra, 2017).

Realism has been deemed limited with regard to understanding energy relationships. Some authors suggest that it has not taken into account the role of non-State actors and market forces. In turn, the concept of energy security has evolved to include the physical availability of energy resources as well as the environmental and economic aspects of energy use.

3 Russian natural gas in Europe: pipelines and energy scenarios

Europe has traditionally purchased much of its natural gas —liquefied or gaseous— from Russia: in 2021, the EU imported a total of 155 bcm (billion cubic metres) from Russia , accounting for about 45% of its gas imports and almost 40% of its total consumption (International Energy Agency, 2022).

Russia's invasion of Ukraine set off alarm bells about Russian natural gas supplies to Europe and the European Commission (2022a) designed the RePowerEU Plan to address the energy crisis. Proposed actions include energy savings, diversification of energy supplies and rapid deployment of renewable energy to replace fossil fuels; it also formulated the goal of ending Russian hydrocarbon imports by 2027.

The EU also imposed economic sanctions banning imports and exports of certain products. For now, the sanctions have not affected natural gas, which can continue to be traded, unlike crude oil which, in the sixth sanctions package established by the European Commission in 2022, banned the purchase, import or transfer of crude oil by sea and of certain petroleum products from Russia to the EU (European Commission, 2022b).

The difficulty in reaching the unanimity required to impose sanctions on Russian gas imports led the EU to explore alternatives to reduce its energy dependence on Russia. In December 2023, the European Parliament and the EU Council agreed on a mechanism allowing national governments to temporarily prevent Russian and Belarusian exporters from reserving capacity in essential natural gas supply infrastructure, both pipelined and liquefied natural gas (LNG) (Krukowska, 2023). At the individual level, European Commissioner Kadri Simson (Martín, 2023) and the Spanish Minister for Ecological Transition, Teresa Ribera Rodríguez (Antonio, 2024) called upon states to stop buying Russian natural gas.

In the absence of sanctions and the difficulty of reaching an agreement, measures that may be adopted individually and voluntarily by Member States are being proposed, creating a scenario of "soft rules" (Urbasos, 2024).

Since the publication of the RePowerEU Plan (Comisión Europea, 2022a), the EU has achieved a significant reduction in pipeline imports of natural gas from Russia. In 2021, approximately 40% of EU gas imports came from Russia through pipelines, while in 2023, this share decreased to approximately 8% (Council of the European Union, 2024).This has been made possible by the development of LNG import capacities and the construction of interconnections, and without having had to resort to energy rationing measures or renounce support for Ukraine (Urbasos, 2024). Despite the EU's efforts to reduce its dependence on Russian natural gas after the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, LNG imports from Russia have increased significantly. In the first half of 2023, EU purchases of Russian LNG increased by 40% compared to pre-conflict levels (Zachmann *et al.,* 2024).

For most of the energy crisis, the flow of natural gas through the Nord Stream, Yamal-Europe and the Ukrainian transit system pipelines remained a cause for concern since any disruption to their supply could have fatal consequences for Europe.

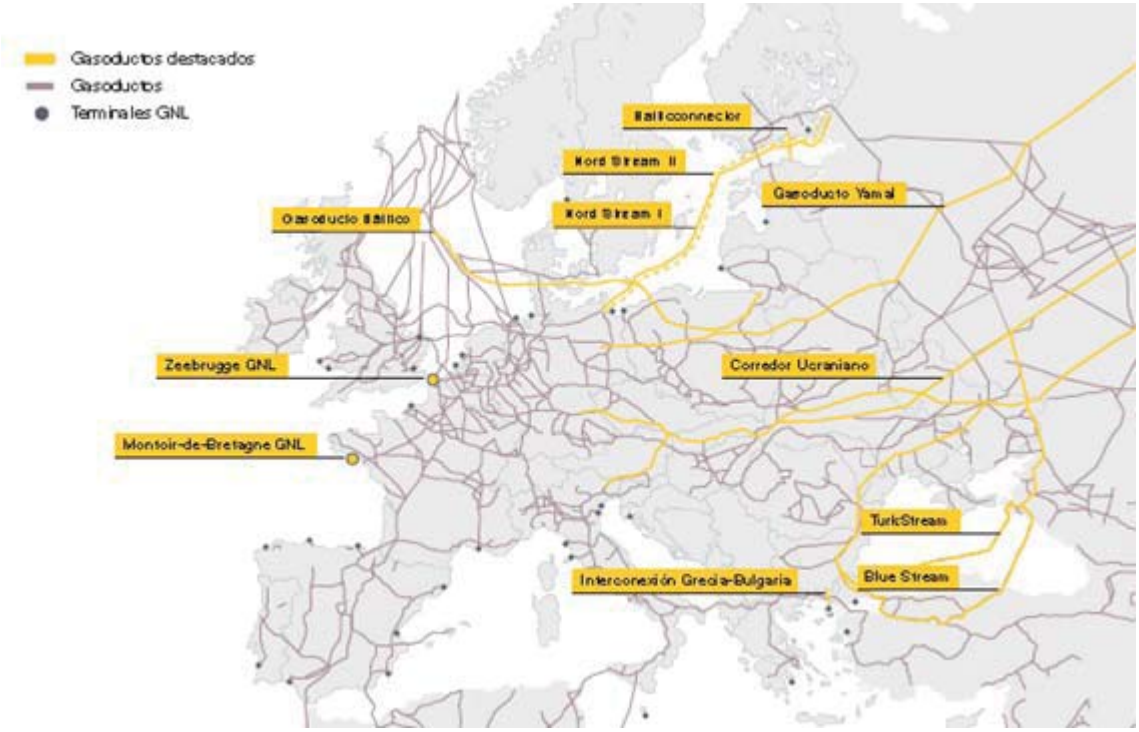

Figure 1. Map of the main LNG pipelines and terminals in Europe. *Source*: Urbasos, 2024

3.1 Germany, Nord Stream and Russia

3.1.1 Nord Stream: Europe's natural gas supply hub

Nord Stream refers to two parallel pipelines (Nord Stream 1 and 2) running along the Baltic Sea bed, designed to transport natural gas from Russia to Germany in order to supply its regions and other European countries (Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom).

Nord Stream 1, which is 1,200 kilometres long, has been one of the world's most important gas pipelines in terms of capacity, transporting up to 55 bcm of natural gas annually from the Russian city of Vyborg to Greifswald in Germany. It was opened in 2012 and became the mainstay of Russian exports to northwest Europe.

Nord Stream 2 was fully built in 2021 and also has a capacity of 55 bcm per year. This pipeline runs from the Russian city of Ust-Luga to the German city of Lubminiy. Unlike the previous pipeline, it is not yet operational as it was pending operational certification by the German regulator and the German Government. To do so, the Nord Stream 2 operator would have needed to establish a German subsidiary, in

accordance with German law. In February 2022, Germany halted the approval process altogether after Russia officially recognised two separatist regions in eastern Ukraine and shortly afterwards, the war broke out (Marsh and Chambers, 2022).

Institutional liberalism in the gas relationship with Russia

Nord Stream has been a key element in the map of gas supply to Germany and, from there, to other European countries. Its planning and construction gave rise to very different opinions in Germany and abroad. This may be seen in statements by contemporary German politicians. The following declarations made in 2007 in the German Bundestag are indicative of the general German perception on this issue:

> "Dependence on Russia is not problematic for Europe or Germany. The problem is that 80 percent of the gas is transported through pipelines running through Ukraine. We will therefore be constantly involved in the unresolved conflicts between Russia and Ukraine and therefore risk suffering from being taken hostage every winter. Alternatively, there are two additional pipelines [...]: the Nabucco pipeline transporting gas from the Caspian to Europe and the Baltic Sea pipeline. It would be desirable not only for the elder statesmen to support these projects, but also for Europe and the German government to promote them more strongly"[3] (Heinrich, 2018).

> "[...] around 80 percent of European natural gas imports are transported through Ukraine. Even after the completion of the *Nord Stream* pipeline in the Baltic Sea, this amount will only be reduced to 66 percent. [...] The German Bundestag calls on the government to: [.....] promote cooperation on energy issues between EU countries more strongly than before. The goal of a European energy community should not only include the establishment of international standards but also coordinated responses to supply disruptions. European standards for the storage of oil and especially gas stocks need to be developed in order to initiate solidarity measures to protect all Member States from the consequences of such disruptions"[4] (Heinrich, 2018).

The then-Chancellor Angela Merkel also defended the pipeline as "a commercial project in which there are private investors" (Gabriele Steinhauser, 2015). In the same vein, also in 2015, the German Vice Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel, in a meeting with Putin, stated that the construction of the pipeline was part of the economic relations between the two countries, and was in the commercial interest, not only of Germany, but also of the rest of Europe (Kremlin, 2015).

The discussions on Nord Stream were actually about increasing natural gas purchases from Russia, and in the arguments put forward by German authorities, one may detect elements of what we have called "energy liberalism".

3 Statement by the MP Manfred Grund (CDU/CSU) in the Bundestag in 2009.

4 Statement by the FDP parliamentary group in the Bundestag in 2007.

For Germany, natural gas has been an object of trade and Nord Stream has been a means of cooperation and thus a source of security. Germany's relationship with Russia, with regard to the pipeline, was one of interdependence, as Russia has been dependent on sales to Germany, given that oil and natural gas revenues together accounted for 46.8% of its federal budget in 2021 (Alexeev *et al.*, 2024).

In Germany's view of energy security, the risk was not its dependence on Russia, but its dependence on Ukraine as the transit country for part of the gas it consumed, due to the ongoing disagreements between the two latter countries. Consequently, the solution to maintain supply was not to diversify suppliers, but to diversify the natural gas route. Indeed, Germany's relationship with Russia was seen as a strength: the Nord Stream pipelines, which for many were a paradigm of Europe's gas dependence on Russia and constituted a threat, for Germany, they increased national and European energy security by diversifying routes, avoiding supply disruption in case of conflict, as had already happened.

This must be contextualised in recent German history and, in particular, within the framework of *Ostpolitik*. This policy encouraged cooperation with Russia on the basis of trade and energy partnership, in the knowledge that shared interests in the energy sector had encouraged cooperation between the two countries after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. "German leaders largely see it as a successful policy, which proved crucial in reducing tensions in Cold War Europe and ultimately created the conditions for the reunification of Germany" (Szulecki *et al.*, 2018).

The commercial treatment of energy relations with Russia does not mean ignoring the fact that gas is a strategic commodity of paramount importance for Germany's economic progress and social welfare, but rather the application of economic rules to ensure energy security.

Germany's Energy Strategy or *Energiewende* has had the goal of transitioning to renewable energy resources and encouraging energy efficiency, for which it is expected to reduce hydrocarbon consumption, without specifically seeking disengagement from Russian natural gas, rather in the search for sustainability itself.

The war in Ukraine has affected *Nord Stream* operations in different ways and for different reasons. German politicians expressed their rejection of the invasion of Ukraine and this stance led them to participate in the EU's adoption of sanctions against Russia (European Council, 2024). In 2022, Russia changed the terms of gas sales and announced that natural gas sold to Europe would have to be paid for in roubles, a decision opposed by Germany (Jennen and Hordern, 2022). This increased uncertainty about the future of natural gas supplies through this pipeline.

Another event that affected the flow of gas through *Nord Stream* was the incident raised by Gazprom regarding the failure of a turbine in the pipeline. The pipeline was being repaired in Canada and, according to the Russian company, sanctions would have prevented its repair and transfer to Europe to be included into the infrastructure, which would have made it impossible to maintain the pipeline (Chatterjee, 2022). As a result, natural gas supplies were reduced to zero in early September 2022 (Lawson, 2022; Zachmann *et al.*, 2024).

On the 26th of September 2022, an explosion ruptured the two pipelines that make up *Nord Stream 1* and one of the *Nord Stream 2*, which were rendered unusable for the foreseeable future (Cursino and McGarvey, 2023). This means that only one line, with a useful capacity of 27.5 bcm, is fit for use. Currently, as of 2022, there are no gas flows through *Nord Stream* (Zachmann *et al.*, 2024).

The outbreak of the war in Ukraine in 2022 radically transformed the relationship between Germany and Russia, previously marked by energy cooperation. Germany adopted a *Zeitenwende* (change of era) approach, as Chancellor Olaf Scholz (Belov, 2024) described it, redefining its energy, diplomatic and military policies. The country imposed broad economic sanctions, supported restrictive EU measures against Russia and approved massive military aid packages to Ukraine. With regard to energy security, it implemented a comprehensive strategy to reduce its dependence on Russian gas. One of the most significant decisions was the accelerated construction of LNG terminals in Brunsbüttel, Wilhelmshaven and Stade (Kotov, 2022).

Thus, energy cooperation, the cornerstone of the German-Russian relationship, crumbled when pipelines were no longer seen as an infrastructure for economic interdependence but as a geopolitical weapon. Institutional liberalism, as noted above, argues that cooperation and interdependence reduce the likelihood of conflict, but do not eliminate it. For a long time, this approach allowed for a stable relationship between Germany and Russia based on shared economic interests, but this balance was upset when Russia used energy as an instrument of strategic pressure (Kotov, 2022).

In this new scenario, the theory of offensive realism seems to provide a more appropriate response to the relationship maintained between the two states until the war in Ukraine. Subsequently, Germany changed its behaviour towards Russia, based on a new perception: it recognised Russia as a direct threat to its security and stability, and redefined its foreign and defence policies to prioritise its national security over any economic benefits derived from energy deals (Halser and Paraschiv, 2022).

Institutional liberalism's economic interdependence was no longer a factor of containment but a strategic vulnerability. As a result, Germany adopted a policy based on offensive realism, focusing on national security, military deterrence and diversification of its energy sources.

3.2 Poland and Ukraine and their perception of Russia as a player in the European energy scene

3.2.1 Yamal Europe (Poland) pipeline: description and background

The *Yamal Europe* pipeline has been a mainstay of Russian gas exports since its construction in 1999. It runs from north-west Russia through Belarus and Poland to northern Germany, with a capacity of 33 bcm per year. The existence of this pipeline

has to be understood in the context of the former Soviet Union. The design and implementation of an extensive pipeline network in the second half of the 1960s enabled the Soviet Union to become the world's largest exporter of natural gas. This network was to be completed by the Yamal-Europe pipeline, linking to Germany via Belarus and Poland (Szulecki *et al.*, 2018).

What had been a unified network of gas pipelines began to unravel after the collapse of the Soviet Union, ushering in a new era in which Russia's strained relations with some of the transit countries in Eastern Europe would largely condition European energy relations.

Thus, the ongoing conflicts with Ukraine, which were particularly intense in 2005-2006, 2009 and 2014-2015, led to disruptions in Russian gas supplies to European countries.

These frictions and potential conflicts prompted Russia to outline a route diversification plan as part of its export strategy to European countries, and this had an impact on the energy policies of Eastern European countries, including Poland. Russia's diversification plan and the fear that Russia would use energy as a geopolitical tool led Poland to embark on a plan to progressively wean itself off Russian gas until it stopped all purchases. This is precisely what makes the Yamal-Europe pipeline special within the context of the current war in Ukraine: since June 2021, flows have been decreasing to coincide with the expiry of the contract between Gazprom (Russian gas company) and Europol Gaz (Polish gas company) at the end of 2022. Since this was a calculated reduction in the flow of natural gas, alternatives to Russian gas could be implemented.

3.2.2 Transit gas pipeline system through Ukraine: concept and context

The gas transmission pipeline system through Ukraine is the historical artery through which the Soviet Union exported gas to Europe since the late 1960s (Högselius, 2014). Gas enters Ukraine from Russia through two inputs (Sokhranivka and Sudzha) and reaches the output point in the Slovakian town of Velke Kapusany on the Ukrainian border. There was also another gas route to Turkey, via Romania and Bulgaria, but it ceased to operate when the TurkStream gas pipeline was opened.

The Ukrainian transmission pipeline system has a maximum capacity of 142 bcm per year, and, similar to the Yamal pipeline, has served multiple purposes: supplying Ukraine and serving as a transit route for gas piped to other countries. The financial management of this dual purpose was as follows: Ukraine paid Russia for the natural gas it consumed, and, at the same time, Russia paid Ukraine a toll fee for using its territory as a transit space to third countries.

The disagreements and lack of understanding between the two countries on this issue caused conflicts that led to supply disruptions in 2005-2006, 2008-2009 and 2013-2014. The presence of power networks linked to oligarchies and the persistence of

corruption in Ukraine would have contributed to the adoption of strategic decisions that, while seeking to reduce energy dependence and strengthen the country's sovereignty, also responded to domestic interests and the influence of lobbies with the capacity to shape national energy policies (Balmaceda, 2023). These disagreements caused Ukraine to stop consuming Russian gas that passed through its territory, however, the pipeline crossing the country was still used to export Russian gas to Central Europe (Henderson and Chyong, 2023).

3.2.3 Polish and Ukrainian perceptions of Russia as an energy supplier

Poland and Ukraine's perception of Russia as a natural gas supplier is manifested in their position on the Nord Stream project. It should be borne in mind that at the time of construction of this pipeline, Poland and Ukraine were transit countries for Russian gas to Germany, which may have influenced their positions on Russia as a supplier of natural gas to the rest of Europe. In any case, the statements made by Polish and Ukrainian politicians provide an insight into how both countries interpret this infrastructure and indeed, in a broader sense, the relationship with Russia.

In Poland, the general feeling is expressed in the following speech in 2005 by the Member of the European Parliament, Bogusław Sonik:

> "The Baltic Sea pipeline [...] harms our energy security; it also harms the energy security of Lithuania, Latvia, Ukraine, Belarus, the Czech Republic and Slovakia and —taking into account environmental damage— Estonia, Sweden and Denmark. [...] Poland needs Russian gas and sensible diversification of supply. We have no aversion to Russia, but common sense requires us to diversify our suppliers. Energy security is one of the most basic objectives of any state. It is therefore also a priority for the European Union"[5] (Szulecki *et al.,* 2018).

In the same vein, the following statements made by Polish MPs in 2008 are also worth noting:

> "The majority of public opinion in our country sees this investment as an attempt by Russia to increase its influence in Central and Eastern Europe. This view is shared by our current Foreign Minister, Radosław Sikorski, who compared the construction to the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact. […]. The gas disputes between Ukraine and Russia are proof that such blackmail is possible"[6] (Szulecki *et al.*, 2018).

5 Statement by MEP Bogusław Sonik in 2005. Gazowy szantaż, Rzeczpospolita, 2nd of July.

6 Statement by the Member of Parliament Jarosław Jagiełło in 2008. Interpellation no. 4634 on the construction of Nord Stream at the 21st session of the Sejm on the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th of September 2008.

> "I would like to remind you that the Moscow-Berlin gas pact is not the first agreement in the history of these capitals to have ignored Poland and gone against Polish interests. The Baltic Sea pipeline, which connects Russia directly to Germany without passing through Poland, is a political decision with strategic consequences for Poland. [...] Has the minister not heard of the economisation of Russia's foreign policy, achieving its political goals by using resource dependence? The Russians openly admit that gas transit has a political, even strategic, dimension. If the construction of the Baltic Sea pipeline were a purely economic investment, why would investors be willing to pay four times the amount required for the construction of the *Yamal* II pipeline?"[7] (Szulecki *et al.*, 2018).

The outbreak of the war in Ukraine increased the rift between Poland and Russia and accelerated all plans, which were framed in a finalist strategy of disengaging from Russian natural gas (Henderson and Chyong, 2023). As Poland had been adopting measures to this end for some time, it was able to act with considerable versatility in the face of the energy crisis arising from the Ukrainian conflict. So much so that it was able to reject Gazprom's demands to pay in roubles and even to terminate the contract early. Additionally, shortly after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Polish authorities sanctioned Gazprom and suspended its rights as a shareholder in Europol Gaz (where it held a 48% stake and owned the Polish segment of the 680-kilometre pipeline), imposing a temporary administration of its shareholdings (Jakóbik, 2021). The acquisition of Gazprom's stake in Europol Gaz by the Orlen Group (Polish oil company) was assessed as being of "fundamental importance for the public interest and security of our country, not only in terms of energy" (Afanasiev, 2023).

The consequence was that Poland integrated the *Yamal-Europe pipeline* into its national gas system instead of leaving it as an import and transit route. The pipeline stopped pumping Russian natural gas in May 2022 (Zachmann *et al.,* 2023), after the Kremlin decided to sanction the project in response to Poland's action against Gazprom. Since then, Poland has been using the Yamal pipeline in reverse mode, importing gas from the German market and then marketing it domestically.

Meanwhile, in Ukraine, the rejection of the gas project may be summed up in the statements included in a letter signed by members of the Ukrainian parliament in 2020:

> "The project's profile is not commercial but geopolitical: to threaten the world. That is why the Kremlin spends so relentlessly on redundant pipelines and fights so fiercely to get them up and running [...]
>
> The Kremlin does not believe in the market, but in the exercise of geopolitical power. This informs the true purpose of the pipeline, which is to boost Russian influence in Europe and cripple Ukraine. Russia

7 Member of Parliament Elżbieta Kruk (PiS). Abbreviated report of the 107th session of the Sejm of the 7th of July 2005.

> currently relies on Ukraine to sell billions of dollars' worth of natural gas to customers in Europe. The Kremlin despises this dependence because it prevents Moscow from further aggression against our country.

Ukraine's role in the transit of Russian gas to Europe is a deterrent against escalating Russian military adventurism. This is the Kremlin's rationale behind *Nord Stream 2*. Completion of the pipeline would remove Ukraine's key leverage over Russia, leaving our country totally vulnerable to Russian subjugation. For Ukraine, it is an almost existential question of national defence and security [...].

Proponents of *Nord Stream 2* expect us to believe that the pipeline is simply another method of supplying energy to Europe. But *Nord Stream 2* does not bring any new gas to Europe, it simply diverts existing Russian gas flows away from Ukraine and concentrates them in the Baltic Sea. There is no further diversification of natural gas and delivery routes, which is the essence of energy security.

[*Nord Stream*] would undermine Europe's energy security. This could prove to be a more threatening and more easily usable weapon than Russia's nuclear arsenal' (Szulecki, K. *et al.*, 2018).

Zelensky described the project as a "danger" to his country and his position may be summed up in this statement: "I am the president of a country at war [...] we consider this project to be a dangerous geopolitical weapon wielded by the Kremlin" (Olearchyk and Miller, 2021).

Poland and Ukraine's negative assessments are based on their perception of Russian energy policy. It is clear from the statements of politicians from both countries that they place Russia's actions within the realm of offensive realism, which may be seen in both countries' conception of each element. For Russia, natural gas is a geopolitical weapon to serve its interests, which would involve extending and increasing its power, isolating Ukraine and Poland, and dividing Europe. Additionally, by connecting Russia directly to Germany, the Nord Stream pipelines lowered transport costs and increased the benefits for both Russia and Germany by eliminating the need to pass through third countries. This strategy was directly detrimental to Ukraine and Poland, which lost significant revenues from gas transport tariffs. The creation of a direct route undermined their economies and, from a geopolitical point of view, limited their ability to influence the European energy market (Batzella, 2022; Kardaś, 2019).

Until the construction of Nord Stream, it could be understood that Russia was dependent on pipelines that crossed Poland and Ukraine to reach the rest of Europe in order to sell its natural gas, and this situation would be a deterrent to a hypothetical Russian intention to cut off supplies. The construction of alternative pipelines would make Yamal or the Ukrainian transit system no longer necessary to supply gas to Germany, a major player in Europe, and thus remove the deterrent —if any— of cutting off supplies as blackmail to achieve other political aims.

For Poland and Ukraine, the construction of alternative routes allowed Russia to threaten them and take hostile action against them insofar as they no longer constituted

a necessary route, but rather a complementary one. Moreover, with Germany and other European countries dependent on Russian gas, the fear grew that, in the event of disruptions or suspension of gas supplies to Ukraine and Poland, the rest of Europe would not come to their aid, thus dividing the continent in the face of such an event. There were also fears in both countries regarding the loss of transit duties and a lack of gas for their own supply.

Russia is perceived by Poland and Ukraine from a realist perspective as a revisionist state, eager to change or revise the established order to increase its power and influence. This view would be based, as it has been seen, on a number of events, such as the continuing energy crises, Russia's attempts to build pipelines to bypass its territories and, recently, Russia's policies towards Ukraine, including its invasion and subsequent energy crises.

However, Poland and Ukraine do not necessarily have a realist perception of the international system. Their perception of Russia as a revisionist State and its assertive and hostile policies have led to a defensive attitude towards this particular country, as both nations have interpreted the energy relationship with Russia as a vulnerability and therefore both Poland and Ukraine have aspired —with more or less success— to disengage from Russian natural gas, which is demonstrated by their respective strategies.

In Poland, fears of Russia using energy as a geopolitical tool prompted the country to take protective measures and expand its infrastructure to diversify energy supplies between 2014 and 2021, reducing gas imports from Russia by 14% in the same period.

Poland's energy strategy considered the diversification of Russian supplies among the primary objectives of its energy security:

> "The development of interconnections with neighbouring countries, together with the development of the national transmission network and the expansion of gas storage facilities, is the second element of the strategy for the diversification of the natural gas supply, which will simultaneously create conditions to develop the market and to increase Poland's importance as a regional centre for the transmission and trade of natural gas" (Ministry of Climate and Environment, 2021).

Some of the measures to disengage from Russian gas were the commissioning of the Baltic gas pipeline linking Poland to Norway (Baltic Pipe Project, 2022), the construction of a floating storage regasification unit in Gdansk Bay (*LNG Prime*, 2023), the expansion of the LNG terminal in Świnoujście to significantly increase import capacity (GAZ system, 2020), and the construction of interconnections with Lithuania and Slovakia.

In turn, Ukraine's fear of the risks of supply disruption has led it to devise policies to reduce its dependence on gas imports and diversify its supply sources and routes. It set the target to increase domestic natural gas production and expand reverse flow import capacities from the most competitive European markets.

From 2017 onwards, the *Energy Strategy of Ukraine until 2035* (ESU, 2017) has been in place, as part of Ukraine's efforts to promote a more systematic and holistic approach to reforming the energy sector, which would improve energy efficiency, security, competitiveness and Ukraine's integration into the EU energy space in line with its commitments to the EU and IMF (OECD, 2020). Among the main identified challenges were geopolitical tensions with Russia, which could result in a significant loss of Russian gas transit revenues. At the same time, the chance for Ukraine to boost its energy independence by reducing its dependence on gas imports from Russia was seen as an opportunity (OECD, 2020).

In 2023, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine approved the *Energy Strategy of Ukraine until 2050* (Enerdata, 2023), which takes special account of the consequences of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, boosting the stability of its energy system and strengthening the role of energy security, which appears as a priority, including energy independence from the Russian Federation.

Energy security has been a priority in Ukraine's strategic approach, and one of its main risks is its dependence on Russia, which is why one of the actions planned to alleviate this weakness is to achieve energy independence from the Russian Federation (Janasz and Obrycki, 2022). As a matter of fact, and within the context of the war, the viability of natural gas supplies from Russia was affected by the Russian army's seizure —in May 2022— of the region where one of its two entry points is located: Sokhranivka, located in Luhansk Oblast, a Russian-speaking area on the border between the two countries. The Ukrainian transmission system operator reported that the situation did not allow them to secure the supply properly and declared *force majeure*; since then Russian gas has entered through a single point: Sudzha, located in Kursk Oblast, on the Russian side of the border (Elliott, 2022).

Thus, Ukraine's perception of Russia and fear of the risks of disruption of Russian supply led it to design policies to reduce its dependence on gas imports and to diversify its supply sources and routes. It had contingency solutions, such as increased domestic production and expanding reverse-flow import capacities from Poland, Hungary and Slovakia, thereby increasing its presence in the more competitive European markets.

Gas continued to flow through this pipeline, but in a much smaller quantity than stipulated, due to the war (Zachmann *et al.*, 2024). Its operation was based on the contract between the two countries that expired on the 31st of December 2024, when it should have been decided whether to renew it, terminate it or agree on a new one, which was rather unlikely.

Currently, and since 2022, Russia has stopped channelling more than 80% of its pipeline shipments to the EU, reducing inflows from Nord Stream and the Yamal pipeline to zero. Natural gas shipments through the Ukrainian corridor were at historic lows until it halted following the expiry of the contract at the end of 2024. Only the TurkStream pipeline, which crosses the Black Sea from Russia to Turkey, continues to deliver natural gas normally to southeast Europe (Urbasos, 2024).

4 A European reality and different national perceptions

4.1 Perceptions of the energy scenario

The situation of the flow of Russian natural gas to Poland, Ukraine and Germany has been analysed on the basis of offensive realism in the first two cases and institutional liberalism in the last case (an interpretative theory valid until the escalation of the war in 2022). In each case there have been different perceptions of Russian natural gas flowing through pipelines, of the pipelines themselves, of the relations between countries, and of energy security itself.

For Poland and Ukraine, the energy relationship with Russia (not necessarily with other suppliers) is based on a realist perception. In this relationship, natural gas is a strategic good with significant value in terms of power and security, which has the capacity to influence inter-State relations and power balances.

The pipelines crossing both countries go beyond being the consideration of natural gas transport and distribution routes and constitute strategic instruments for Poland and Ukraine, as well as Russia. They are perceived as a foreign policy instrument that may be used to achieve political objectives, including as a means of blackmail. Energy security in relation to Russia is marked by patterns of behaviour and ambition aimed at expanding its power and influence.

It was precisely the fear of the use of gas as a geopolitical weapon that spurred countries such as Poland and Ukraine to take steps to disengage from this dependence.

For Germany, natural gas has been primarily a commodity, the trade of which promotes stability and progress; Nord Stream was an infrastructure at the disposal of interdependent trade relations, with energy security being conditioned by economic and technical factors. This interpretation —as it has been seen— is in line with the premises of institutional liberalism: energy security depends on the fulfilment of agreements and economic variables, which are those that have defined the energy relationship with Russia, although without forgetting that it is a vital strategic asset for the country.

With the outbreak of war in Ukraine in 2022, the relationship between Germany and Russia can no longer be interpreted in line with the principles of institutional liberalism, but rather realism. Natural gas, once an economic good subject to international trade rules and agreements, became a tool of geopolitical pressure, and economic cooperation and interdependence ceased to be stabilising factors. Germany, facing a direct threat to its energy and geopolitical security, reorganised its foreign policy, aligning itself more closely with NATO and adopting an energy diversification strategy that would reduce its vulnerability.

4.2 Gas flow after the invasion of Ukraine: different situation, same result

The natural gas relation with Russia has traditionally developed on different assumptions in Germany, Poland and Ukraine. All three countries, however, have had their supplies cut off by Russia after condemning the invasion of Ukraine.

For a long time before the last invasion of Ukraine in 2022, it was debated whether Russia would be able to use the gas to achieve political goals and cut off Nord Stream supplies, or whether the revenues from its sale would deter it. The question was answered in the affirmative or in the negative, depending on whether the answer came from realism or liberalism, respectively. From the carried-out case study, it is clear that liberal perceptions have not had the expected effect, as interdependence has not prevented Russia from using natural gas as a geopolitical weapon. Germany, despite having a liberal conception of its energy relationship with Russia, has suffered equally from the supply cut.

It seems, therefore, that what is decisive is not so much the theory on which the gas relationship is interpreted, but rather the theory by which the behaviour of the supplier country is interpreted. And to this the following may be added: the relevant realist perception would not be that of the consumer countries regarding the elements under examination but that which is projected onto these elements by the supplier country, Russia, in this case. What is conclusive in predicting whether interdependence will pose a deterrent or not is not so much the reciprocal benefits of the energy relationship, but rather the supplier's profile. Its liberal or realist character is probably what defines whether the energy relationship is primarily commercial or geopolitical. However, this practical assumption does not eliminate the debate between the two theories.

The disparity in perceptions of the energy relationship with Russia did not lead to different supply situations but did inspire different strategies. For Poland and Ukraine, supply disruption was a likely scenario and consequently, they had adopted plans to disengage from Russian gas. Germany, on the other hand, considered the suspension of supply unlikely, and therefore did not envisage alternatives to Russian gas. It did have measures to reduce the hydrocarbon share in its energy mix for environmental reasons, but not due to geopolitical fears, unlike Poland and Ukraine.

It is clear from the above that the German and Polish-Ukrainian national energy strategies were very different.

5 Conclusions

Poland, Ukraine and Germany's energy relationship with Russia over the gas it pipes to them may be explained via different theoretical assumptions.

Poland and Ukraine's energy relationship with Russia is developed on the basis of offensive realism: natural gas is a strategic commodity, pipelines are potential

geopolitical weapons, their relationship with Russia has been one of dependency and vulnerability.

In the view of these two countries, natural gas transcends its economic value to become a key tool in the fight for national security. Russia, acting as a revisionist actor, would have instrumentalised its energy exports to consolidate power and exert political pressure. The construction of alternative infrastructures and the diversification of energy supplies by these countries reflect a realist understanding of the international environment, where strategic resources are factors of State power and survival.

Based on these realist interpretations, the possibility of Moscow using gas as a political weapon led both countries to view this dependence as a critical vulnerability. As a result, they prioritised strategies aimed at diversifying their suppliers and strengthening alternative infrastructures.

In Poland, this materialised in the construction of LNG terminals and the expansion of energy interconnections with Europe. As for Ukraine, it developed strategic alliances with the EU and the US to secure alternative routes and promote its own energy sources.

Germany had framed its energy relationship with Russia within the theory of institutional liberalism. Natural gas was seen as a commercial commodity, pipelines were avenues for collaboration and the relationship around gas was one of interdependence, mutually beneficial to both countries. From this perspective, the construction of the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines was based on the premise that energy trade would create lasting economic ties that would deter conflict and promote mutual stability. Germany relied on long-term contracts and stable prices, believing that a strong trade relationship with Russia would provide energy stability.

The benefits of this relationship and the deterrence of the use of gas as a political weapon meant that the energy relationship with Russia was seen as a strength. However, this vision proved vulnerable to changing geopolitical dynamics.

In 2022, it became clear that the disparity in energy conceptions and strategies adopted by Poland, Ukraine and Germany did not lead to different scenarios and all three countries were equally affected by Russia's use of natural gas as a political weapon. Despite varying approaches —from the offensive realism adopted by Poland and Ukraine to the institutional liberalism guiding German energy policy— Russian control over pipelines turned energy supply into a tool of geopolitical pressure.

Russia's attempt to influence European support for Ukraine through the strategic use of gas exposed a common weakness: dependence on Russian energy supplies. The stopping of gas flows through Nord Stream, initially conceived as a symbol of cooperation and commercial stability, demonstrated the limits of economic interdependence when confronted with broader strategic considerations. The liberal approach that viewed this infrastructure as a basis for reciprocal stability crumbled in the face of geopolitical realities.

The war in Ukraine thus marked a turning point in Germany's energy and foreign policy, redefining its stance towards Russia and its theoretical approach to international relations. Until then, Germany had followed an approach based on institutional liberalism, but Russian aggression demonstrated the limits of this perspective, pushing Germany towards a stance of offensive realism.

German energy policy underwent a drastic readjustment: natural gas, previously considered a commercial commodity under a market logic, was transformed into a strategic resource subject to the geopolitics of power. Germany reacted by redefining its energy security and adopting a policy of supply diversification. The accelerated construction of LNG terminals and the signing of agreements with countries such as the United States, Norway and Qatar reflect this paradigm shift.

This strategic shift also manifested itself in foreign policy. Berlin hardened its stance towards Moscow through severe economic sanctions and military support for Ukraine, adopting a logic of power and security typical of offensive realism (Belov, 2024). The concept of *Zeitenwende* (change of era) articulated by Chancellor Olaf Scholz underlined this transformation. Germany recognised that relying on a single energy supplier compromised its sovereignty and geopolitical stability.

Within this context, the supposed logic of mutual benefits inherent in energy trade was displaced by a logic of power. The idea that economic ties could deter aggressive behaviour proved insufficient to contain Russia's strategy. Energy supply, far from acting as a stabilising element, became a vulnerability exploited for the Kremlin's geopolitical interests.

Ultimately, Germany's change of position shows how crises can profoundly alter the theoretical interpretation of international relations. Offensive realism prevailed over institutional liberalism, demonstrating that, in extreme crisis scenarios, national security and State power trump the logic of trade and cooperation. This structural change in German politics redefines its role within the international system, consolidating it as an actor aware of power dynamics in an increasingly volatile global environment.

Germany moved from the liberal logic of economic cooperation to a security posture based on offensive realism. This evolution not only illustrates theoretical flexibility in the practice of international politics, but also demonstrates how the quest for security and power remains a key driver in the global system.

In summary and as a final consideration, it is clear that based on the preceding analysis, a new energy order began to take shape after 2022 with repercussions on a European and international scale. In order to understand and design security policies within this new order, it is enlightening to study the cases of Poland, Ukraine and Germany in their gas relations with Russia, in both contexts of peace and conflict.

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