

Tamás Kun

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## SOCIALNI INŽENIRING V EVROPSKI ENERGETSKI KRIZI?

### SOCIAL ENGINEERING IN EUROPE'S ENERGY CRISIS?

**Povzetek** Današnje navzkrižje interesov izhaja iz časov hladne vojne. V članku je predstavljen pregled preteklih in sedanjih razmer v evropski energetske krizi od začetka rusko-ukrajinske vojne do njene prve obletnice. Ker so ZDA imele možnost izvoza energije svojim zaveznicam v Evropi, so to priložnost lahko izkoristile za ustvarjanje distance med seboj in Moskvo, kar se tiče energetskih vprašanj. ZDA so v zadnjih letih prehiteli Rusijo v tekmi za izvoz nafte in Rusija je morala ukrepati, da bi preprečila to konkurenčno grožnjo. Po invaziji na Ukrajino so se v medijskih poročilih o energetskih vprašanjih pojavljale različne zgodbe, oblikovalci politik pa so pogosto dajali zmedene izjave.

**Ključne besede** *Socialni inženiring, manipulacija, energetska kriza, vladno komuniciranje.*

**Abstract** Today's conflict of interests can be traced back to the Cold War. The present article reviews the past and current situation in Europe's energy crisis from the start of the Russia-Ukraine war to its first anniversary. Since the US had the capability to export energy to its allies in Europe, they were able to use this opportunity to create a distance between themselves and Moscow in energy issues. The US has outrun Russia in the oil export race in recent years, and to counter this competitive threat, Russia had to act. Different narratives appeared in media reports on energy issues after the invasion of Ukraine, and policy makers often made confusing statements.

**Key words** *Social engineering, manipulation, energy crisis, government communication.*

**Introduction** In the case of Pearl Harbour in the Second World War era, the Japanese were cut off from oil reserves, which meant a setback to their economy. The military option was forced from the country as a last resort. The kind of message exchange between countries on energy issues that we observe today is certainly not new; there have been many cases in the past where manipulation has played a major role in the decision-making process. Energy exporting countries such as the US, Russia and Saudi Arabia, or transit countries such as Ukraine and Belarus, have often used communication strategies or military force to push progress in their activities. In different time periods in recent history, nation states have often had disagreements due to their own interests in trade and the sphere of protection (mostly for mineral resources). Europe's energy dependencies have come from the COMECON (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance), where soviet satellites (the Warsaw Pact countries) and NATO-allied countries such as the former Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) were even in contact with the Soviet Union about natural gas imports (Czerniejewicz, 1986). Significantly, long after 1991, these connections have remained intact up to recent years. However, in previous decades many steps were taken in order to change the status quo of the past century.

## 1 METHODOLOGY

Influenced by Comtian positivist sociology, the view of law-making changed during the early 20th century. There was an unspoken understanding between jurists that the “scientific method” was applicable to law and legal philosophy (Gardner, 1961). This statement supports the intention of measurable and goal-oriented legislation, which correlates with the research problem of this study. The “Theory of Social Engineering” comes from Roscoe Pound, who thought of lawmakers as the engineers of society. *“The aim of social engineering is to build as efficient a structure of society as possible which requires the satisfaction of the maximum wants with the minimum friction and waste.”* (Mahajan, 1983, p. 634) This research aims to provide empirical evidence based on past experiences projected onto present-day events. Simply put, events in the past often show analogies or patterns that can be applied to current problems. In this study, the coverage begins with the Cold War-based energy system in Europe and goes through its alternative sources before arriving at present-day problems such as the problems with the dialogue on energy issues.

The events gathered are based on the principle of supposed manipulation. Our news consumption habits have undergone dramatic changes compared to previous decades; the appearance and broad spread of the printed press, terrestrial radio and television broadcasting, and the development of the internet, fundamentally changed the forms of mass communication. With the advent of social media, the direction of mass communication has also changed, as now the reactions and opinions of society have become visible, which previously had typically been exhausted in the form of open letters and in one of the classic manifestations of social discontent, demonstrations. Politics slowly infiltrated the interfaces provided by social media,

changing the trend in its own activities. Daily check-ins, live broadcasts, and almost continuous connection with the public have priority above all else.

## 2 THE COLD WAR ERA

The agreement to construct a mutual oil pipeline for the Soviet Union and its satellite member states was signed on 18th December 1958, at a COMECON session in Prague. The Druzhba (meaning “Friendship”) pipeline was constructed between 1960 and 1962 to supply the oil requirements of Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia and the German Democratic Republic. The proposed length of the pipeline was 5327 kilometres. “As the world’s largest oil pipeline, Druzhba remains a key link in the European energy section four decades after its initial construction,” (Pipelines International, 2009). The idea of the Adria oil pipeline came to life in 1964. Over the following decade Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Poland and Romania expressed interest in the project. Four years later, Austria left the group. In 1974, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary agreed on the construction of the pipeline (MOL Group, 2015, p. 18). Oil from the Middle East came through this channel to Europe, which diversified the supply channels, but also opened new directions and possibilities. After the completion of the Hungarian section, it had a connection to the Druzhba pipeline; by this, Moscow gained an opportunity to export oil directly to the Mediterranean. The supplies in the Adria pipeline came to a halt during the Yugoslav wars (Haász, 2008), which thwarted the efforts of Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia to buy crude oil from other sources (Öğütçü, 1995, p. 52). After the collapse of the Soviet Union the inner three (Russia, Belarus, Ukraine) independent countries were formed. The starting point was that Ukraine was at a disadvantage compared to other European countries (mostly post-Soviet satellites) in gas price issues; while it paid 80 US dollars for 1000 cubic metres, European countries were paying between 60 and 70, which inevitably led to conflict with Russia. Ukraine had the ability to siphon off gas from the pipeline, creating delays in deliveries while storing up supplies, which reduced Moscow’s ability to pressurize energy issues while making their own bargaining chip over prices (Balmaceda, 1998).

## 3 UKRAINE’S GAS TALKS WITH EUROPE

In January of 2006, there was a time when Ukraine blocked several European countries’ gas imports due to the particularly cold weather, according to the spokesman of Ukraine’s state-owned energy firm Naftogaz (BBC, 2006). Eighteen countries were affected by the shutdown of gas flows, from large EU members such as Germany to small nations like Moldova (Reuters, 2009). At the same time Hungary, Romania and Poland reported that the pressure level in their pipelines had dropped. The EU sent inspectors to Ukraine to assure Russia that Ukraine would not siphon off gas from the pipeline. In exchange Russia pledged to turn the flow back on as monitoring began (Cendrowicz, 2009). After this, Europe began to look

for other alternatives, not just substitute partners, but other sources of energy such as renewables and nuclear. Until the construction of the Nord Stream-1 pipeline, the Russian gas exports that transmitted to Europe through Ukraine were around 80%, which dropped to 50-60% due to the new pipeline. The natural gas flow in the winter was around 12 bcf (billion cubic feet), and 6 bcf in the summer (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2014).

Uncertainty in energy matters was and is a problem that arises from time to time in European countries. Until the financial crisis, it could be used as an important trump card for Ukraine to exert pressure in the implementation of its foreign policy. The disagreements between the parties were mostly political in nature; one such example was the pro-NATO and EU government led by Viktor Yushchenko, whose name is also associated with the Orange Revolution. His rival was the pro-Kremlin Viktor Yanukovich, who rejected an in-progress EU association agreement and tried to distance Ukraine from Europe, closing ties with Moscow. Troubled life paths and corruption scandals characterized the political life of Ukraine at that time. This was partly due to the fact that after the collapse of the Soviet Union Russia did not renounce influence in its sphere of interest. In politics, there is no such thing as a vacuum. This uncertainty eventually led to the Euromaidan protests, where protesters clashed with the police on the central square of Kyiv, Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Kun, 2018). Later the protests turned to revolution, where Yanukovich's legitimacy was questioned and he eventually fled the country. The established situation concluded in the annexation of Crimea in 2014. The first sanctions against the Russian Federation by the EU came into being on 17 March 2014. After that, the possibility of an armed conflict between Ukraine and Russia was inevitable.

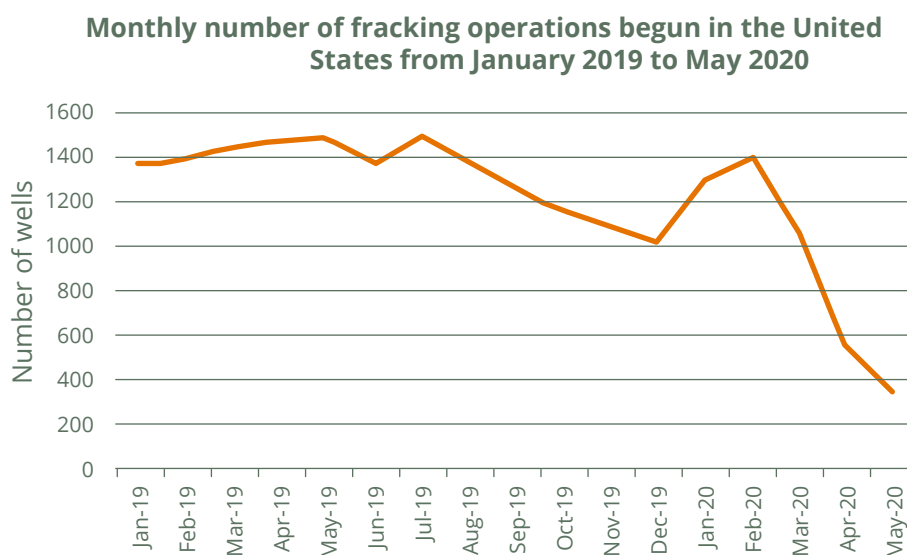
#### **a. The birth of Nord Stream and the appearance of LNG on board**

Commissioned on 8 November 2011, the Nord Stream-1 pipeline became Germany's primary natural gas source, originating in Russia. Back in the 2010s, Germany's main intention with the undersea pipeline had been to counter its dependency on Ukraine, which the crisis in 2014 had confirmed, reminding the country of 2006 when Ukraine blocked natural gas flows for almost two weeks (Osorio-Tejada, et al., 2017, p. 791). Learning from the past experiences Europe began to build re-gasification plants in order to be able to receive LNG supplies from across the world (Bianco, et al., 2015); however, the environmental risks arising during LNG deliveries (injuries, environmental pollution, mandatory maintenance) did not form the basis of the consideration, as in general short-term diversification opportunities dominated, and only a small number of European countries had access to the sea to operate LNG terminals. Exporting and transfer countries were often influenced by complex political circumstances which resulted in insecurity in supply. The second line of NS was cancelled (Marsh & Chambers, 2022) as a protest against Russian aggression in the Ukrainian crisis of 2022.

## 4 FRACKING IN THE UNITED STATES

Fracking is a technology used in natural gas and petroleum production, based on injecting fluid underground at high pressure in order to open up fissures through which crude oil or gas can make their way to the surface (Britannica, 2022). In the US economy, gas and oil production support approximately 10 million jobs, which is 6% of total US employment. Since 2018, around 90% of rigs have been using fracking technology (Goswami & George, 2020). Thanks to the shale revolution the US has become the “undisputed” leader (Siciliano, 2018) in oil and natural gas production. In contrast, in the next decade China will surpass the United States in nuclear power, despite the fact that China is also the biggest customer of US natural gas. The cost of renewables will presumably drop significantly in the future, overshadowing today’s mainstream fuels.

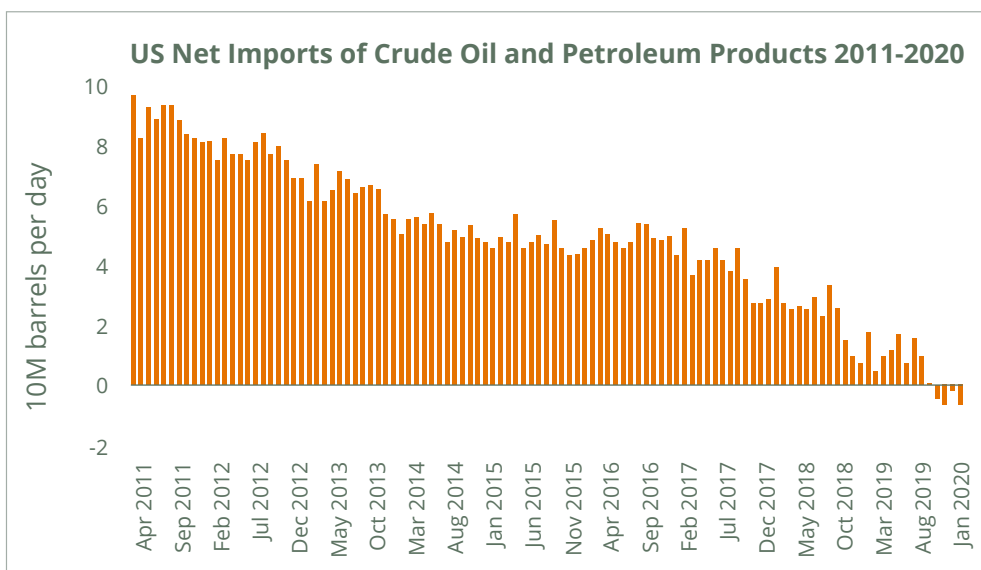
**Figure 1:** Monthly number of fracking operations begun in the United States from January 2019 to May 2020 (Data source: Statista, <https://www.statista.com>)



According to the graph there was a significant drop in operations between 2019 and 2020. The reason for this could be that as the number of Covid-19 cases in the US rose during the pandemic, the labour force was expelled from these sites. Because of this, the number of wells probably began to decrease (Figure 1), and without the workforce to operate those assets, the sector faced a decline in progress. Fracking was a campaign theme during the US 2020 presidential election, where both candidates circled around this issue due to its job-creation and economic impacts (Blackmon,

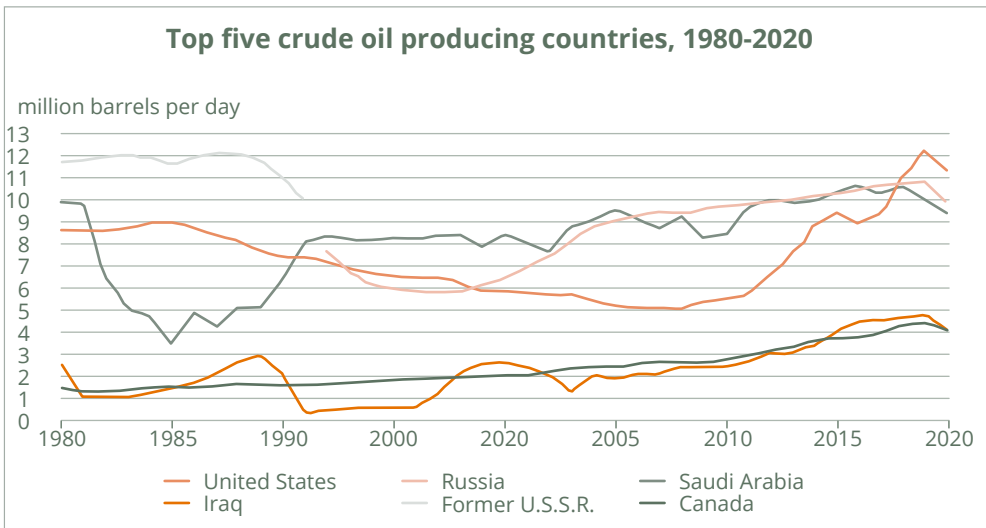
2020) in the swing state of Pennsylvania. This had a significant effect on the vote, which eventually turned in the favour of the Democratic Party candidate. On social media platforms such as Twitter (Matthews & Hansen, 2018), people had debates over the case. There was a disagreement within society, which was most likely political, rather than inspired by technical or economic solutions. Many feared that environmental costs would be the price of economic progress, which is why it was a trending theme in the election.

**Figure 2:**  
US Oil Import-  
Export chart  
2011-2020  
(Data source:  
US Energy  
Information  
Administration,  
<https://www.eia.gov>)



During pandemic the US became independent (Figure 2) in crude oil production, due to its shale oil operations. This resulted in a change of position in the rankings of oil exporting countries in the world, as the US has reached the top, above the Russian Federation and Saudi Arabia (Figure 3). LNG imports were once again put on the agenda of the EU, which created a new opportunity for the US to expand its influence on energy issues in Europe. However, these opportunities led to conflict with Russian energy interests. Although the fracture lines had already existed between the Russians and Ukrainians due to their common history, this was the final nail in the coffin. These interests were probably also present at the time of the Arab Spring, where the two nuclear powers, the United States and Russia, met through proxy conflict over the status of the Libyan and Syrian governments and other territorial interests.

**Figure 3:**  
Top five crude oil producing countries in the world  
(Data source: US Energy Information Administration, <https://www.eia.gov>)



### a. Energy issues in security policy

The benchmarks of this analysis are the similar situations that occurred in the past, where energy provider and mediatory countries had similar political tools in hand, making attempts to manipulate European countries' policies because of their energy dependencies. Natural gas was commonly used for industrial purposes such as electricity production and for domestic use in heating. Uncertainty in these areas could form the trend of public opinion towards political issues, and this is where social engineering comes into the picture. To provide the desired outcomes, there are measures that must be taken. Governments all over the world have an idea towards their own citizens in how their people deal with certain items such as news, current circumstances, and changes in their daily life. A typical factor is the price of commodities such as gas and petrol. In Europe in the autumn of 2022 this was a pressing issue; due to the combination of the approaching winter and the uncertainty of energy supplies, governments found themselves in a particularly awkward situation, which was difficult to communicate to the population. On the surface, there were high level debates over this political issue, while in the background, business continued its own way, as usual.

This review of the history of Europe's energy background gives us a clear approach to present-day events. What has actually changed is that the time seems to have arrived to end dependence on Russian energy carriers and to steer the operation in a new direction. According to Besenyő, several European countries began to look for alternatives in recent years (Libya and Algeria); however, the Russian Federation's reaction was that they began to buy shares in Algerian oil and gas fields (Besenyő, 2019).

**Table 1:**  
Gasoline  
prices change  
between July  
2021 and June  
2022 (USD/litre)  
Data Source:  
trading-  
economics.  
com

Country	2021 July	2022 January	2022 May	2022 June
Ukraine	1.09	1.10	1.66	1.67
Russia	0.67	0.66	0.88	0.96
United States	0.83	0.87	1.17	1.30
Germany	1.91	1.97	2.36	1.99

Since the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war, fuel prices have skyrocketed in several countries; however, the main problem lies not solely in these prices, but with the parallel rise in forex exchange rates and their indirect effects. The rise in mainstream currencies such as the dollar and euro determines the cost of fuel in many countries across Europe. In the first months of the war the European Union's flagship economy faced an almost 20% increase in petrol prices (Table 1) compared to the most powerful country in NATO and the two opposing sides in the conflict. The change in fuel prices is primarily reflected in transportation, which has an overarching effect on residential consumption. Thus, the price increase caused by the energy crisis is clearly visible in people's everyday lives, as they consume products and services that have become more expensive. The situation is made worse by the fact that, in addition to the supply and demand changes occurring on the global energy market, the exchange rate changes of the leading currencies have an additional price-increasing effect, so the phenomenon cannot be reduced solely to a question of supply shortages. Additionally, nation-states are working to try to keep their own budget deficits under control in the current situation, especially those who are more likely to be interested in the financial stability of their own population.

## **b. RePowerEU Plan**

In order to be able to cope with the changed energy market environment due to the Russia-Ukraine war, the European Commission has developed an action plan that fulfils a dual role: it is intended both to end dependence on Russian fuels "which are used as an economic and political weapon and cost European taxpayers nearly €100 billion per year" (European Commission, 2022), and to transform Europe's energy system. The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) is at the heart of the RePowerEU Plan, which supports coordinated cross-border planning and financing activities for Member States to implement their own energy projects and reforms. Saving energy is the most effective and cheapest way to deal with the current energy crisis and reduce the costs involved. In the Commission's recommendation, it intends to increase long-term energy efficiency from the current 9% to 13%. Saving energy helped to face potential challenges in the winter of 2022, and short-term behavioural changes concluded in the reduction of gas and oil consumption by 5%. Member



States are also encouraged to promote savings through financial measures, such as VAT reductions on energy-efficient heating equipment, building insulation and products. The EU has worked in coordination with international partners to diversify supplies, and has contracted record levels of LNG and gas pipeline capacities. The Commission has also set the goal of increasing the distribution of renewable energy sources from 40%, which had been considered as the guideline for 2030, to 45% (European Commission, 2022).

### **c. EU's sixth package of sanctions: oil import restrictions**

In 2021, the EU imported crude oil worth EUR 48 billion and refined products worth EUR 23 billion. In response to Russia's aggressive attack on Ukraine and the atrocities committed against its civilian population, the European Commission adopted a sixth package of sanctions, which includes a ban on Russian crude oil. This currently represents 90% of the EU's oil imports. The ban includes a phase-out period to allow the sector and the market to transition, as well as a transitional exception rule for countries that currently obtain oil through pipelines, so that they can find suitable alternatives to withdraw from Russian oil during this time. After a six-month interval, EU operators will be prohibited from insuring and financing, particularly maritime shipping routes, which will make it difficult for Russia to sell crude oil globally (European Commission, 2022).

## **5 MANIPULATION IN GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION**

The LNG trade between the US and the EU increased by 23% in 2021 (European Commission, 2022); this figure is remarkable in itself because it predates the RePowerEU campaign. In 2022, the EU carried out implementation processes for this, one example being that Germany signed an initial contract (Kurmayer, 2022) to build its first LNG terminal in Wilhelmshaven, investing approximately EUR 65 million (Pekic, 2022). These investments are able to change the direction of the current dependency situations; however, even so, decisions on energy issues are placed outside the continent. While the European Union is having a debate over an embargo on Russian crude oil and petroleum products, including making restrictions (Cahill, 2022) on the shipping of oil and products from the Russian Federation, Italy's oil imports are four times higher than they were before the start of the Russia-Ukraine war (Evans, 2022). The already-existing ownership relations were able to overturn the success of the sanctions because there is an oil refinery in Sicily owned by Russia's Lukoil company (Barry & Santalucia, 2022). The jobs created by the refinery would threaten the financial security of the workers in the region, so the hands of the Italian government are tied on the issue. Meanwhile, a month previously Prime Minister Mario Draghi had pledged full support for the EU's gas embargo against Russia (The Local, 2022). If there are several options for a country to import energy, statements like this have no real impact on political communication. At the EU summit of 30 May 2022, EU leaders agreed on the Russian oil embargo, which estimated a 90% cut in imports, with exceptions made for landlocked countries such

as Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, which were allowed (Rankin, 2022) to import Russian oil through the Soviet-era Druzhba pipeline. Croatia announced that the country was ready to expand the Adria Oil pipeline, an alternative source for Hungary, if problems occurred with Russian oil imports (CEEnergy News, 2022).

The energy crisis narrative was on the agenda in Europe on a daily basis. Germany feared that gas supplies through the Nord Stream-1 pipeline would not be stable (Laurence, 2022), because Russia stopped the flow due to annual maintenance works. This was another strong trump card in Russia's hands. The uncertainty forced European countries to make difficult short-term decisions to ensure the safety of their energy supplies. Daily governmental communication shapes the trends on the stock markets, especially on forex trades. So, it can be said that the recommendations, news releases and guidelines in the current government communication are not necessarily published with the aim of providing information on current situations; in many cases they are part of short-term preparatory and foundational campaigns, so that the target audience are not unexpectedly affected by the changes that occur in their everyday lives, especially in a situation like the Russia-Ukraine war. Inflation around 10%, skyrocketing exchange rates and uncertainty are characterizing people's lives throughout Europe. The possibility of a food crisis is still on the agenda today due to fertilizer prices.

#### **a. Nord Stream sabotage**

In 2021, the European Union imported 155 billion cubic metres of natural gas from Russia, which was 45% of the EU's total gas imports and close to 40% of its total gas consumption. *"Nobody is under any illusions anymore. Russia's use of its natural gas resources as an economic and political weapon show Europe needs to act quickly to be ready to face considerable uncertainty over Russian gas supplies next winter,"* said the IEA Executive Director, Fatih Birol, in March 2022 (International Energy Agency, 2022). However, this uncertainty turned out to be quite bearable due to the mild winter.

On 26 September 2022, after a series of explosions on the Baltic Sea, the natural gas pipelines Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2 began to leak. These undersea pipelines were built to transfer gas between Russia and Germany. Months after the sabotage a European official stated that: *"There is no evidence at this point that Russia was behind the sabotage"*, concluding the results of 23 diplomatic and intelligence officials in nine countries interviewed in the previous weeks. *"We know that this amount of explosives has to be a state-level actor,"* said the Finnish Foreign Minister, Pekka Haavisto, in an interview about the incident (Harris, et al., 2022).

On February 8 2023 a blog post was published by Seymour Hersh, an American Pulitzer prize-winning investigative journalist, which said that, according to a source with direct knowledge of the operational planning, US Navy divers, operating under the cover of a widely publicized NATO exercise called BALTOPS 22 in June 2022, planted the remotely triggered explosives on the Nord Stream pipelines, which were

detonated three months later, destroying three of the four pipelines (Hersh, 2023). After this publication, the White House denied the accusations of the blog post, i.e. that the United States was behind the destruction of the Nord Stream gas pipelines, describing it as “utterly false and complete fiction”, as did spokespersons for the CIA and State Department. Reuters did not reinforce the report published by Hersh. The United States and NATO called the incident “an act of sabotage”. On the other side, Moscow blamed the West for the unexplained explosions that caused the ruptures. Neither side has provided evidence (Reuters, 2023).

Weeks after Hersh wrote his self-published report on his blog at Substack he had an interview with RT (Russia Today), where he claimed that US President Joe Biden ordered the destruction of the Nord Stream pipelines in order to make sure Germany could not change its mind about sanctions against Russia and weapons shipments to Ukraine (CGTN, 2023). Vasily Nebenzya, Russian Ambassador to the UN, spoke during the Security Council’s discussions, where he mentioned that Moscow was submitting a request for an independent investigation in the light of doubts about the honesty and transparency of Denmark, Germany, and Sweden in their ongoing investigation. He said that there was “proof that explosives were planted” near the pipeline during a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) exercise in the summer of 2022, referring to a report by Seymour Hersh which claimed that Washington was involved in the sabotage (UN News, 2023). Similarly Jeffrey D. Sachs, a professor at Columbia University, also noted in a recent UNSC briefing that the destruction of the Nord Stream pipelines required a very high degree of planning, expertise and technological capacity, and only a handful of State-level actors had both the technical capacity and the access to the Baltic Sea required to have carried out such an attack. He also mentioned the Washington Post’s article about Russia’s inadequate interference and Hersh’s blog post (United Nations, 2023).

Hersh’s publication is what must be recognized as the only credible account of the sabotage of the Nord Stream pipelines that has appeared in the media. However, just because we say it is credible does not mean it is true. Being consistent with important historical facts, it is the “only” reliable story on the simple basis that there is no other. Initially, the NYT and others followed the US government line that the “most likely” explanation was that Russia was sabotaging its own facilities (Isackson, 2023). Mainstream media outlets are either totally silent or trying to remain neutral in the discussion and avoiding choosing sides.

**Conclusion** Based on the above, it is logical that the patterns correlate with information operations as the military appearance of social engineering. The psychological manipulation which is clearly on the table between the opposing sides is certainly visible. There have been several investigations into major events, such as the Nord Stream sabotage, where the culprit’s identity remained unknown, but the media reports suspected several actors. The difficulties between the EU and Russia on gas and oil today has similarities according to past events, but now, rather than the Cold War rhetoric, there are actual war events running in Ukrainian territory, which at first

were called a “Special Military Operation” in Russian terminology. In the first year since the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war on 24 February 2022 there have been many cases where manipulation appeared in governmental communication. Europe is still suffering from the external effects resulting from its dependencies on many fronts: energy, food, and military strength. The war in Ukraine brought up decades-old differences between policy makers in Europe, and now the common challenges are more critical than ever.

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email: [kun.tamas@uni-obuda.hu](mailto:kun.tamas@uni-obuda.hu)

**e-mail: [kun.tamas@uni-obuda.hu](mailto:kun.tamas@uni-obuda.hu)**

**Tamás Kun** je doktorski kandidat na študiju vojaških ved na doktorski šoli za varnostne vede Univerze Óbuda v Budimpešti na Madžarskem, kjer od leta 2019 tudi predava. Strokovno se specializira za socialni inženiring in geopolitiko okviru dejavnosti v kibernetnem prostoru. V svojih raziskavah preučuje manipulativno vedenje v novicah in drugih medijih ter jih poskuša povezati z geopolitičnimi dogodki, s čimer pomaga usmerjati tudi akademsko življenje in javno mnenje.

**Tamás Kun** is currently pursuing a PhD in Military Sciences at Óbuda University, Doctoral School on Safety and Security Sciences, Budapest, Hungary, where he has also lectured since 2019. His expertise is in social engineering and geopolitics pertaining to cyberspace activities. In the course of his research, he examines manipulative appearances in the news and other media and tries to link them to geopolitical events, which may help to inform academic life and public opinion.

ORCID : <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6620-7157>

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