

MEDIA FRAMING OF THE ENERGY CRISIS AND ITS IMPACT ON OIL TRADE AND ENERGY SECURITY IN EUROPE DURING THE RUSSIA–UKRAINE WAR: EVIDENCE FROM ROMANIA AND AZERBAIJAN

МЕДІЙНЕ ФРЕЙМІНГ ЕНЕРГЕТИЧНОЇ КРИЗИ ТА ЇЇ ВПЛИВ НА ТОРГІВЛЮ НАФТОЮ ТА ЕНЕРГЕТИЧНУ БЕЗПЕКУ В ЄВРОПІ ПІД ЧАС РОСІЙСЬКО-УКРАЇНСЬКОЇ ВІЙНИ: ДОСВІД РУМУНІЇ ТА АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНУ

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The Russia-Ukraine war triggered a severe energy crisis in Europe, reshaping oil markets and geopolitical relations. This study examines how international media framed the crisis and how those narratives intersected with actual shifts in oil trade structures. Drawing on framing, agenda-setting, and securitization theories, the research employs qualitative media content analysis of 240 articles from BBC News, Reuters, and The New York Times (2022–2024), combined with statistical trade data from UN Comtrade and WITS. The analysis identifies four dominant frames: geopolitical conflict, energy dependence, economic impact, and securitization. These frames evolved over time, with “energy weaponization” and “dependence” narratives peaking during the imposition of EU sanctions and aligning with diversification efforts in Romania (an oil-importing EU member) and export expansion in Azerbaijan (an oil-exporting partner). The findings demonstrate that media narratives did not merely reflect market dynamics but actively shaped policy discourse and public understanding of energy security. The comparative cases of Romania and Azerbaijan illustrate how framing varies according to a country’s position in the energy supply chain. The study underscores the growing role of journalism in constructing geopolitical realities and calls for further interdisciplinary research linking media discourse, political decision-making, and energy policy.

Key words: energy journalism, media framing, oil politics, international journalism, energy security, geopolitical communication, Romania, Azerbaijan.

Війна між Росією та Україною спричинила серйозну енергетичну кризу в Європі, змінивши ринки нафти та геополітичні відносини. Це дослідження розглядає, як міжнародні ЗМІ фреймували кризу та як ці наративи перетиналися з фактичними змінами в структурах торгівлі нафтою. Спираючись на теорії фреймінгу, встановлення порядку денного та сек'юритизації, дослідження використовує якісний аналіз медіаконтенту 240 статей з BBC News, Reuters та The New York Times (2022–2024) у поєднанні зі статистичними даними про торгівлю від UN Comtrade та WITS. Аналіз визначає чотири домінуючі фрейми: геополітичний конфлікт, енергетична залежність, економічний вплив та сек'юритизація. Ці фрейми розвивалися з часом, причому наративи про «енергетичну зброю» та «залежність» досягли піку під час запровадження санкцій ЄС та узгоджувалися зі зусиллями з диверсифікації в Румунії (члені ЄС, що імпортує нафту) та розширенню експорту в Азербайджані (партнері, що експортує нафту). Результати показують, що медіа-нарративи не просто відображали динаміку ринку, а активно формували політичний дискурс та громадське розуміння енергетичної безпеки. Порівняльні випадки Румунії та Азербайджану ілюструють, як фреймінг змінюється залежно від позиції країни в ланцюжку постачання енергії. Дослідження підкреслює зростаючу роль журналістики в конструюванні геополітичних реалій та закликає до подальших міждисциплінарних досліджень, що пов'язують медіа-дискурс, прийняття політичних рішень та енергетичну політику.

Ключові слова: енергетична журналістика, медіафреймінг, нафтова політика, міжнародна журналістика, енергетична безпека, геополітична комунікація, Румунія, Азербайджан.

Introduction. In the context of the modern global communication environment, media institutions are increasingly playing an important role with respect to the way international political events are understood

by societies. International political events such as political crises, economic conflicts, and political confrontations are no longer understood or perceived through government communications. Instead, these

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are understood or perceived through communications created by journalists or media institutions. Therefore, modern international relations are highly related to the broader context of international information flow and media communications [1].

Energy politics is one of the most critical areas related to the interplay between economic systems, international politics, and media communications. Oil and gas are not just economic resources; they are critical tools for international politics. Therefore, countries that are rich in these resources or are critical suppliers to other countries are often considered to be in a position to exercise geopolitical power over other countries.

The Russia-Ukraine War has become a major turning point in global energy politics since its escalation in 2022. Prior to this, Russia had been one of the major exporters of oil and gas to European countries. European nations have relied heavily on Russian oil and gas to meet their demand for energy to sustain their production levels and transportation systems and meet their own demand for energy. When the Russia-Ukraine War escalated, Western nations decided to impose sanctions against Russia. This created much uncertainty with regards to the energy import relationship between Russia and European nations.

This has created much concern with regards to energy politics in European nations. The prices of oil rose considerably in global markets. European nations were then forced to look for alternative energy sources. However, the perception of the entire crisis has been greatly affected by the media. The media has described that this crisis is not only an economic phenomenon but also a geopolitical one.

This article aims to analyze the perception of the energy crisis due to the Russia-Ukraine War by the media and how it has affected European politics. It will try to understand this phenomenon by understanding the media's role in global politics. Besides discussing the framing of the energy crisis in the media, this article also aims to discuss the economic and geopolitical impact of the crude oil crisis in different countries that are part of the European energy market. Two countries were chosen to be part of this study: Romania and Azerbaijan. These countries are chosen because they embody different positions in the European energy market. Romania is an oil-importing member state of the European Union, while Azerbaijan is an oil-exporting country that became an alternative energy source for European countries during the energy crisis. By analyzing data regarding crude oil imports and exports, this study aims to compare the framing of the energy crisis in the media with actual changes in oil trade structures and energy partnerships during the Russia-Ukraine war.

Literature Review. The relationship between media communication and international politics in

energy security has been studied in different domains of knowledge. In media communication, framing theory is one of the most important theories in understanding the relationship between media communication and international politics in energy security. According to Entman, framing theory can be defined as “selecting and organizing some aspects of a topic and presenting them to the audience in a way that influences their understanding and appreciation of the topic.” [2].

The agenda-setting theory was proposed by McCombs and Shaw (1972). According to this theory, “the mass media does not tell people what to think but how to think about what to think.” [3]. In other words, the media can focus on different issues in energy security and thus influence political decisions. Later studies confirmed that agenda-setting theory was important in international politics.

Castells [4] focused more on the concept of communication power, which, according to him, has a strong relationship with political power, information, and media networks. This means that, according to this theory, media narratives have the power to shape political, economic, and geopolitical discourse.

Energy security and energy geopolitics have been an important topic of research as well. Goldthau & Sitter [5] focused their research on the analysis of energy security in Europe, with a particular emphasis on the importance of the diversification of energy suppliers. Yergin [6] focused his research on the global history of energy geopolitics, with a particular emphasis on the geopolitical importance of oil and gas resources. Stern [7] focused his research on the analysis of the energy factor of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, with a particular emphasis on sanctions, gas trade, and geopolitical pressure.

Though there has been a lot of research done on media framing, energy security, and geopolitics, there has been a lack of research done on the analysis of media framing with a particular emphasis on the real economic effects of the energy crisis, as presented through the cases of Romania and Azerbaijan.

Goals and Objectives. The general objective of this research is to examine how the international media framed the energy crisis in the Russia-Ukraine war and to examine how the crude oil crisis affected the structures of oil trade, diversification of energy, and energy relations in Europe, particularly in Romania and Azerbaijan.

In order to achieve the general objective, the following research objectives were identified:

A) To examine the theoretical foundations of media framing.

B) To examine how the international media framed the energy crisis in the Russia-Ukraine war.

C) To examine the main narratives presented by the international media in discussing the price of oil, dependency on energy, and security.

D) To examine how international media framed the energy crisis in Europe.

E) To examine how the European Union responded to the energy crisis.

F) To examine how crude oil was diversified in Romania.

G) To examine how Azerbaijan exported crude oil to Europe.

H) To examine how the crude oil crisis affected the relationship between media narratives and geopolitical events.

To provide guidance for the research questions to be answered through the empirical research, the following research questions are formulated for the study:

RQ1: What has been the international media's framing of the energy crisis during the war between Russia and Ukraine in terms of security, geopolitics, and economic impacts?

RQ2: What have been the dominant frames of international media's reporting of the crisis in terms of energy weaponization, dependency, diversification, etc., and how have they changed over time?

RQ3: How any changes in international media's framing of the crisis reflect changes in the structures of oil trade for an importing country such as Romania and an exporting country such as Azerbaijan?

The research questions provide a framework for the integration of media content analysis with trade data to enable a comparative assessment of framing impacts.

Methodology. The research methodology employed for this research is qualitative and comparative. The methods employed are media content analysis, document analysis, statistical data analysis, and case study methods.

The media content analysis has been employed to study the coverage of international media on the energy crisis during the Russo-Ukraine war. The media coverage has been analyzed to study the narratives on energy security, energy dependency, oil prices, and geopolitical tensions.

Document analysis has been employed to study international organization reports, policy reports, and energy market reports on energy security in Europe.

For the media content analysis, a purposive sampling approach was employed, using media sources such as BBC News, Reuters, and The New York Times, from January 2022 to December 2024. The search terms “energy crisis,” “oil prices,” “Russia-Ukraine war,” and “Europe energy security” were used as keywords. A total of 240 media articles were selected using a coding framework based on the theory of framing. The coding framework identified four main frames: geopolitical conflict (emphasizing the rivalry between Russia and the West), energy dependence (emphasizing energy dependence in Europe on Russian oil and gas), economic

impact (emphasizing oil prices and inflation), and securitization (emphasizing energy as a security issue). The inter-coder reliability of the study was determined using Cohen's kappa, which stood at 0.84, showing a high level of agreement. The media frames were tracked on a quarterly basis.

Statistical data analysis has been employed to study the diversification of crude oil imports to Romania and the crude oil export structure to Azerbaijan. The trade data has been collected from international databases such as World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS) and the UN Comtrade database to study trade partner diversification, supplier diversification, and export structure between 2016 and 2024.

The case study method has been employed to study Romania as a case study. Romania has been taken as a sample country to study the impact of energy security on oil-importing European Union countries. Azerbaijan has been taken as a sample country to study the impact of energy security on oil-exporting countries.

1. Media Framing and Agenda-Setting in International Journalism

2. The theory of media framing defines the process by which media journalists choose to highlight some aspects of reality. Media framing theory implies that the manner in which information is communicated plays a crucial role in shaping the audience's perception of various occurrences and political issues. Frames assist the audience in understanding the causes, consequences, and solutions to various problems that may arise in the future [8].

Agenda setting theory is a related concept to media framing theory. This theory implies that the media, in essence, does not dictate to the audience what to think, but rather what to think about. If, for instance, the media focuses on a particular issue, that issue becomes a priority in the audience's perception and in the political arena as well [9].

The media plays a crucial role in shaping the audience's perception in the context of international conflicts. Media communication defines the issue at hand, whether it is an economic, humanitarian, or political issue. Through consistent communication, the audience is able to perceive a particular issue as a priority in the political arena.

The effect of media framing can also be seen in a situation of crisis. Economic disruptions in a situation of geopolitical conflict are often explained in terms of political narratives rather than economic factors. This can lead to a situation in which economic factors are discussed in a political context.

In the Russia-Ukraine war, media coverage from other countries often featured topics such as energy dependency, economic pressure, and geopolitical rivalry. This can be seen as a media framing of energy supply disruptions as strategic issues rather than market fluctuations.

In addition to this, the media framing in the Russia-Ukraine war was not limited to the economic side of the energy crisis. The media framed the energy crisis in a way that presented the issue in political and security terms. Most international media framed the energy crisis in such a way that it was a consequence of geopolitical tensions between Russia and Western countries. This kind of Media Framing changed the focus of the audience's discussion from the economy to energy security.

Another significant media framing in the international media was the concept of "energy dependence." Most international media framed the energy crisis in such a way that they emphasized the concept of dependence on Russia's oil and gas. This kind of media framing changed the focus of the audience's discussion from the economy to energy security. This shows how media framing can shape the audience's opinion in the short term and their policy in the long term in the energy sector.

3. Energy Security and the Securitization of Oil Politics

The concept of securitization acts as a significant theoretical base for the understanding of the energy issue as a security concern. Securitization theory suggests that the role of political actors and the media lies in the ability to transform a political issue into a security concern through communication and discourse [10].

Once the issue is identified as a security concern, the government may use the opportunity to justify the implementation of extraordinary measures to deal with the situation. These extraordinary measures may range from the use of sanctions, emergency laws, and new diplomatic relations. In the energy crisis caused by the Russia-Ukraine war, the media portrayed the energy issue as a geopolitical tool. According to the reports, Russia could use oil and gas as a geopolitical tool to pressure European countries.

These interpretations have affected the political discourse on the issue of energy policies in Europe. There is an emphasis on the need for diversification in the sources of energy, investment in renewable sources of energy, and cooperation with alternative suppliers [11]. Media attention has also reinforced the emphasis on these policies by highlighting the risks that may arise from dependency on one supplier.

4. Media Coverage of the Energy Crisis

International news agencies were at the forefront of disseminating information regarding the events linked to oil prices. Large media houses, including the BBC, Reuters, and the New York Times, developed comprehensive analysis pieces that sought to evaluate the implications of the rising oil costs.

Some of the dominant ideas that were presented across the media platforms included the idea of "energy weaponization." There were concerns that energy resources were potentially used as tools of geopolitics. This linked the economic events with the geopolitics of the Russia-West rivalry.

Another dominant theme that was presented across the media platforms included the energy dependence of the European economies. There were concerns that European economies had become dependent on imported energy resources. Decades of reliance on the energy resources from Russia had led to the emergence of vulnerabilities in the European energy sector. By repeatedly focusing on the energy dependence of the European economies, the media helped shape the energy discourse.

Oil price volatility was also an issue that dominated the media's attention. The media frequently carried news about the rise in the price of oil. Such news helped in the creation of public awareness about the crisis. It also puts pressure on the government to take immediate action on the matter.

Apart from the news carried about the market, there was also expert opinion provided by the media. Experts in the fields of economics, oil, and politics provided such opinions. The media not only carried news about the crisis, but it also helped in the conceptualization of the crisis.

5. Political Responses in Europe

These stories created by media institutions played an important role in influencing European politics. As the European citizens became more concerned about the energy security, the politicians were forced to respond to the crisis.

One of the major actions taken to respond to the crisis was the imposition of economic sanctions against Russia by the European Union and its allies. The media played an important role in portraying these sanctions as counteractions to geopolitical aggression against European security interests.

Table 1

European Dependence on Russian Energy Before the Russia-Ukraine War

Country	Share of Oil Imports from Russia (%)	Share of Gas Imports from Russia (%)
Germany	34	55
Italy	25	40
Poland	65	50
Hungary	58	60
France	17	24

Source: International Energy Agency (IEA), Eurostat Energy Statistics, BP Statistical Review of World Energy, European Commission Energy Reports.

Table 2

Major Changes in Global Oil Prices During the Russia–Ukraine War

Period	Average Brent Oil Price (USD per barrel)	Key Event
January 2022	86	Rising geopolitical tensions between Russia and Ukraine
March 2022	118	Start of the war and sanctions by the European Union
June 2022	120	Global supply uncertainty and market volatility
December 2022	82	Market stabilization and alternative supply adjustments
2023 Average	83	Energy diversification policies in Europe

Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), BP Statistical Review of World Energy, International Energy Agency Oil Market Reports, Macrotrends Brent Oil Price Data.

In addition, the European nations were also working to improve their access to diverse forms of energy. There were increased negotiations with new forms of energy suppliers, as well as increased investment in renewable forms of energy [12].

Energy diplomacy was also an essential part of foreign policy in the European region. The need for new partnerships with energy-producing countries was identified in order to secure energy supplies and minimize the risks of political dependence. The media portrayal of energy diplomacy further reinforced the public belief that energy policy was an essential part of international politics.

The aforementioned examples demonstrate how media influences policy by affecting public opinion.

6. Journalism and Geopolitical Narratives

The energy crisis is an example of how the media contributes to the construction of geopolitical narratives in the information environment. The media does not simply report the news but rather interprets it in the context of the broader political environment.

By using techniques of framing that place emphasis on strategic rivalry, economic pressure, and security concerns, the media were able to transform the market events into geopolitical narratives. These narratives had an impact on both public opinion and political action.

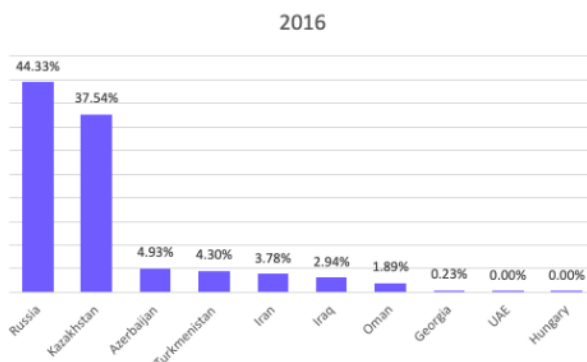
The place of the media in the construction of international discourse is an increasingly significant phenomenon in the digital age. The ability of the media narratives to spread around the globe in mere minutes gives them an enormous political importance. Therefore, the media institutions act as an intermediary between the economic events and the political interpretation of them.

The importance of the media in the construction of geopolitical communication is vital in the analysis of international relations.

8. Changes in Oil Trade Relations and Energy Security: The Case of Romania and Azerbaijan

Based on the statistical data on oil imports and exports from 2016 to 2024, it is observed that the energy crisis caused by the war between Russia and Ukraine led to changes in oil trade relations in Europe. The case studies on Romania and Azerbaijan show changes in oil trade relations in oil-importing and oil-exporting countries.

In the case of Romania, the statistical data on oil trade relations shows that Romania had several suppliers of crude oil before 2022, but the country had been importing oil from Russia over the years. In this case, it is observed that even though Romania had several suppliers, the country had a structural dependence on Russia in terms of oil imports [13].



Source: Author's compilation based on data from World Integrated Trade Solution and UN Comtrade Database, HS Code 270900 (Oils; petroleum oils and oils obtained from bituminous minerals, crude).

Fig. 1. Romania's Partners for Crude Oil Imports in 2016

After the war between Russia and Ukraine, Romania changed its oil import structure significantly. The country did not import any oil from Russia after the war, and instead, oil imports began from Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Iraq, Libya, Norway, Saudi Arabia, and African countries. In 2024, Romania had a highly diversified oil import structure, with oil being imported from countries in the Black Sea region, the Middle East, Africa, and the Americas [14].

This diversification minimized the risks of political pressure, supply disruption, and transit dependency. Thus, the case of Romania illustrates how an energy-importing country responded to the energy crisis through diversification of suppliers.

The case of Azerbaijan represents another trend that is related to the above issue. Being an oil-exporting country, Azerbaijan benefited from the European quest for alternative suppliers of energy after the decrease of Russian oil exports. According to the data, Italy remained the main export destination for Azerbaijan's crude oil during the whole period under review, confirming the significance of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline and Azerbaijan's integration into the European market. At the same time, Azerbaijan had export agreements with several European countries such as Germany, Spain, Greece, Croatia, Portugal, and Romania, as well as with some Asian countries such as India, China, Thailand, and Vietnam [15].

Following the 2022 energy crisis, the value of Azerbaijan's export of crude oil increased substantially due to the higher prices of oil. India emerged as one of the main consumers of Azerbaijan's crude oil. This clearly proves that Azerbaijan has been capable of diversifying the market for the export of its oil [16].

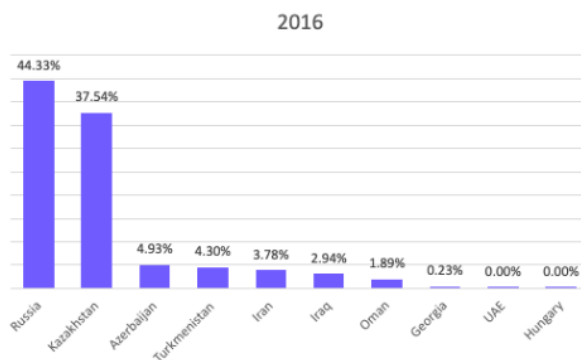
An analysis of media framing trends in relation to trade data also showed a strong temporal correlation. For instance, in the first quarter of 2022, the “geopolitical conflict” and “energy weaponization” frames were at their peak in media coverage, which

coincided with the European Union’s announcement of sanctions and the rise in Brent crude oil prices, which went past the \$118 per barrel mark. By mid-2022, the “energy dependence” frame dominated, appearing in 62% of media coverage, which also marked the period when Romania started recording zero imports from Russia. For Azerbaijan, in the second half of 2022, there was a rise in media frames on its role as a “reliable alternative supplier,” which also marked a 37% increase in the value of crude oil exports to Europe compared to 2021.

It is evident from the above explanations that the energy crisis of the Russian-Ukraine war triggered diversification in the oil market both in terms of imports and exports. While the Romanian case proves that the country had to diversify the suppliers of oil to maintain security of supply, the case of Azerbaijan proves that the country had to diversify the markets for the export of oil to enhance the value of the country.

Moreover, it is clear from the above explanations that the energy crisis of 1973 triggered diversification in the oil market both in terms of import and export. While the Romanian case proves that the country had to diversify the suppliers of oil to maintain security of supply, the case of Azerbaijan proves that the country had to diversify the markets for the export of oil to enhance the value of the country.

Conclusion. The cases of Romania and Azerbaijan demonstrate the diverging yet interrelated paths of energy security, influenced by the energy-related discourse of the media. Romania, an EU member country and oil importer, reacted to the securitization of the energy issue by the media by immediately removing Russian oil from the list of imported oil and increasing the diversity of oil suppliers to include Kazakhstan, Iraq, and African countries. This action was accompanied by continued emphasis by the media on “vulnerability reduction” and “supply security.” Azerbaijan, an oil-exporting country, took advantage of the crisis to reinforce its role as a strategic partner for



Source: Author's compilation based on data from World Integrated Trade Solution and UN Comtrade Database, HS Code 270900 (Oils; petroleum oils and oils obtained from bituminous minerals, crude).

Fig. 2. Romania’s Partners for Crude Oil Imports in 2024

Europe. The media discourse portrayed Azerbaijan not as a vulnerable energy supplier but as a “geopolitical buffer” and an “energy bridge.” While the Romanian media, both domestic and foreign, focused on risk mitigation, the Azerbaijani media emphasized the expansion of the oil market, new export markets such as India and China, and the strategic importance of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. This underlines that the role of a country within the energy supply chain influences the energy-related discourse.

The energy crisis caused by the Russia-Ukraine War shows the influence of media narratives on the way people perceive international politics. The oil supply disruptions and energy price increases are economic facts; however, their political significance was created by the media.

The international media portrayed the energy crisis as a strategic issue related to energy security, geopolitics, and economic security. These media narratives affected the political discourse across Europe and informed the European response to the crisis.

The results obtained in this study suggest that journalism plays an increasingly important role

in international politics. As international conflicts acquire economic and informational dimensions, media narratives will continue to shape the way people perceive international politics.

The results obtained suggest that further research on the interrelations between media discourse, political decision-making, and international energy policy could provide a deeper understanding of the role of journalism in international relations.

The results emphasize the need to devote more scholarly attention to the complex interaction between media discourse and energy policy implementation. The study could be replicated or extended to include social media as a potential area of influence on energy discourse. A comparative approach to various countries that are both importers and exporters could be taken to better understand the role of media discourse on energy diversification. As the European energy situation continues to change, the construction of energy security remains a critical area to study, especially within journalism studies and international political economy.

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