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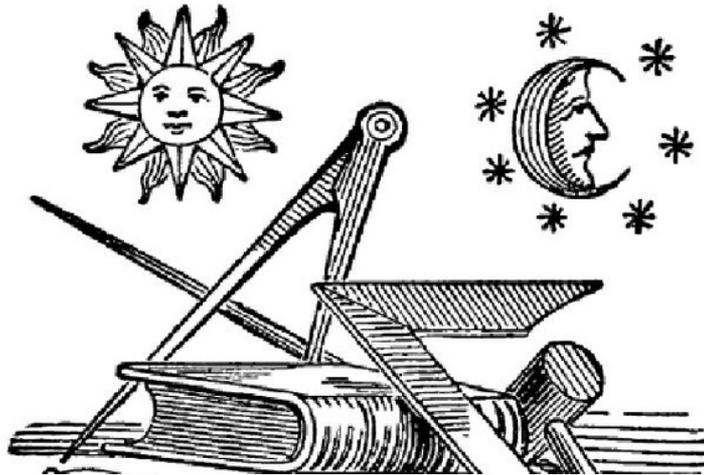
Kacper Szulecki

Russian Oil Conspiracies, the Blackout Myth and Governance by Fear



Norwegian Institute
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What drives conspiracy thinking around energy?



- Energy is central to national economies and human lives
- It is also a complex issue of arcane expert knowledge linked to power & money
- Change feeds mistrust, energy transition is change towards unknowns
- Simple explanations often rely on full or partial conspiracy theories
- States can play an active role



What are conspiracy theories?

- The conviction that a group of actors meets in secret agreement with the purpose of attaining some malevolent goal (e.g. Bale, 2007)
- Key elements of conspiracy theories acc. to Van Prooijen & van Vugt, 2018
 1. people, objects, or events are causally interconnected (pattern)
 2. plans of alleged conspirators are deliberate (implying agency)
 3. always involves a coalition of actors working in conjunction
 4. an element of threat
 5. an element of secrecy, difficult to invalidate
- A populist tool of power (Fenster, 2008)

Who controls energy? Who inspires change?

- Governments?
- Consumers?
- Markets?
- Energy companies?
- MNCs?
- Financial speculators?
- All of the above?



Who controls energy?

- Russia's problem:
how to explain oil price volatility?
- Who controls oil prices?
- Most flamboyant conspiracy theories in use





RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Russian oil price conspiracies

“political and economic problems of the oil states can be traced to the unusual properties of petroleum revenues,” i.e., scale, source, stability, and secrecy (Ross 2013: 5)

- Oil and gas are a key source of wealth: hydrocarbon taxes account for “43% of budget revenues, and 38% come directly from oil and oil products” (Henderson and Grushevenko, 2017)
- Experts and policymakers like to engage in prognoses, prophecies and wishful thinking, but the oil price is beyond the regime’s control
- When price falls, explanations need to be found, turning public attention away from Russia’s petrostate



RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Making Sense of Chaos: Three Tropes of Oil Price Semantics

- **Blind-blaming:** globalization and capitalism are responsible for Russia's problems. If more specific steering of these global forces is mentioned, it usually does not go beyond general notions of "the West," the "Anglo-Saxon" cultural circle, etc.
- **Securitization:** these narratives identify external threats and often claim to give examples of decisions/practices that undermine national security
- **Scapegoating:** identifying a clear source of conspiratorial agency (clubs of bankers, Jewish financiers, and secret lodges).

See: Etkind A., Szulecki K., Yablokov I. (2020) Petroleum Conspiracies: How Russian Policymakers Seek Meaning in Oil Price Volatility. In: Belyi A. (eds) *Beyond Market Assumptions: Oil Price as a Global Institution*. Springer, Cham

Who inspires change? Who selects the pathways?

- Is energy transition inevitable?
- Is decarbonization a must?
- Is climate change a threat?
- Here, climate denialism, skepticism and conspiratorial thinking about energy intersect



Poland: Far-right nationalist conspiracy seeking

- Poland's power and heating sectors are heavily dependent on coal
- Although imports are increasing, most coal remains indigenous
- A clear link between coal and national energy security – the notion of 'energy autarky'



Poland: Far-right nationalist conspiracy seeking



“Behind this alarmist tone, there is, of course, the left wing's passion for social engineering”

“There was already an ozone hole, acid rain, global cooling, etc. The cunning leftists will always find a reason to take money for nothing”

“It's about a new colonialism under the banners of leftist democracy and the fight for nature. There is no need to succumb to [them] because they will enslave us”

Poland: Far-right nationalist conspiracy seeking

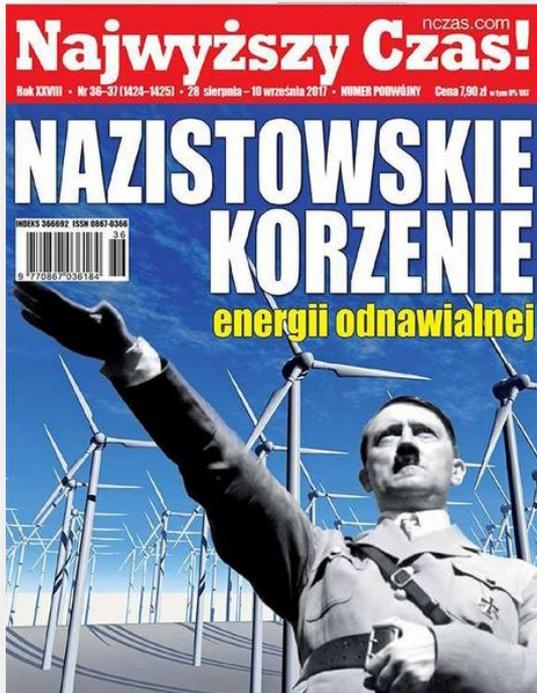
“[As] if the world was [organized] according to a Marxist model, has to automatically develop in one direction only—a new mixture of cultures and races, a world made up of cyclists and vegetarians who only use renewable energy and fight all forms of religion”

Witold Waszczykowski, MFA



See: Żuk, P and K. Szulecki, 2020, 'Unpacking the right-populist threat to climate action: Poland's pro-governmental media on energy transition and climate change', *Energy Research & Social Science*, 66, 101485

The Blackout Myth and Energy Transition as a German Plot

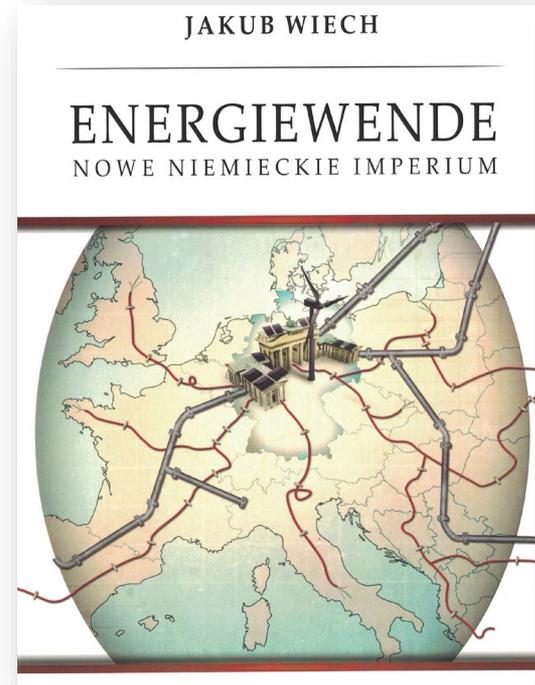


- “RES are associated with high costs, uncertainty regarding stability [and] concerns regarding the entry of foreign companies in the Polish market”
- The blackout ‘myth’
- „It's not a ‘comedy,’ it's acting for foreign interests. We are to buy energy from the rulers of Europe”

The Blackout Myth and Energy Transition as a German Plot

“[At one meeting] I expressed my surprise at the fact that I was supposed to express the internal Polish point of view in the presence of representatives of German foundations [...] Some Polish participants were not able to understand that employees of German foundations work for the German state and we should first discuss things among ourselves”

Head of dept. at a governmental think-tank



Conclusion: Governing by Fear?



- All these cases have one common feature: the construction of a threat (internal or external) and a securitizing mechanism
- Fear can be used to distract attention from bad governance (Russia) or to discredit calls for change (Poland)
- Scaremongering (e.g. around the blackout „myth” or the German „plot) can also help the state reclaim control over the energy sector, increasingly penetrated by market logics and decentralized ownership (incl. civil society)

See: Szulecki, K., 2020, Securitization and state encroachment on the energy sector: Politics of exception in Poland's energy governance, *Energy Policy*, 136, 111066

Conclusion: Governing by Fear?



- Securitization is „the selection of non-change” and “a mode of intervention that blocks something specific and in a specific way: by defining what is not allowed to happen and can therefore be prevented by all means necessary” (Wæver 2019)
- Latour (2018) argues that climate denial and other campaigns to block climate action are performed rhetorically around *threat* and from attractive subject positions associated with embodying defense
- Identifying instances of securitization and governance by fear – a critical task

See: Szulecki, K., 2020, Securitization and state encroachment on the energy sector: Politics of exception in Poland's energy governance, *Energy Policy*, 136, 111066

TU Delft SIET Webinar:
Conspiracy Theories and the Energy Transition

4 December 2020

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POPULISM

«an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite'» (Mudde, 2004)

CONSPIRACY

a group of people who make secret arrangements to advance their personal interests, consequently causing harm to their community (Bale, 2007)

→ Conspiracies are a «theory of power» (Fenster, 1999)

TOP-DOWN CONSPIRACIES: A POPULIST GOVERNING STRATEGY

	PUTIN (RUSSIA)	TRUMP (USA)
<i>Narrative</i>	Oil price volatility	Foreign policy (e.g. also public support mobilization for steel and aluminium tariffs in March 2018, Boucher & Thies, 2019)
<i>Motive</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity • Financial primacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disengagement • Financial primacy
<i>Strategy</i>	Blind-blaming, securitization & scapegoating	Blind-blaming, securitization & scapegoating
<i>Goal</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reclaiming control • Electoral support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reclaiming control • Electoral support
<i>Enemy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foreign • Domestic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foreign • Domestic

DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGNS: FranceLibre24

- EU DisinfoLab conducts **open-source investigations**
- FranceLibre24: Polish far-right media network that, posing as a news aggregator, manipulates content to polarize society on various topics

https://fl24.net/2020/11/30/migrants-renter-maison-la-macronie-place-le-retour-des-cla...
gouvernement espagnol a même dépêché sa police au Sénégal pour juguler l'immigration.

Il y a quelques jours, l'Espagne a signé avec l'Italie, la Grèce et Malte un [appel de détresse aux autres membres de l'UE](#), leur demandant de ne pas les laisser seuls en première ligne face au fléau migratoire, et de se répartir "le fardeau", notamment en les aidant à les expulser. Une position que Clément Beaune a dit "*comprendre et défendre*".

Source: AFP

Actualités

Contactez l'AFP
Vous avez une info, un commentaire à transmettre à l'AFP ? Écrivez-nous par...

MAIL FACEBOOK TWITTER

Racisme: Balotelli de nouveau victime du racisme

3 NOV 2019



AFP/Anovias / Marco D'Amico

L'attaquant de Brescia Mario Balotelli lors du match contre la Juventus, le 24 septembre 2019 à Brescia

Déjà victime par le passé d'incidents racistes en Italie et en France, Mario Balotelli a de nouveau été la cible de cris de singe dimanche à Vérone, où il a été tout proche de quitter définitivement le terrain.

L'incident a eu lieu peu avant la 60e minute du match. Après une action sur le côté gauche, l'attaquant de Brescia a pris le ballon en mains et l'a violemment expédié en direction des supporters du Hellas Vérone.

En plein match, le footballeur italien Mario Balotelli fait sa petite crise à cause des cris racistes imaginaires

Par Gaëtan Vincent - 03/11/2019

Facebook Twitter

Articles récents

- Réglement de comptes dans une cité sensible d'Ile-de-France, un mort par...
- Attaque islamiste au Mozambique: quatre personnes tuées et plusieurs blessées
- Belgique: Pourquoi le dealer magnétien taise-t-il un passant étonné?
- Le patron de McDonald's pour avoir couché avec un employé
- Marseille: Fallait-il la suite d'un banal accident de la circulation...
- VIDEO: Pourquoi des réalités déconcertantes une quarité urbaine à Chantaloupes-Vignes?

- Through an IP address search, we were able to connect **FL24** to other two websites: **Wolnosc24** and **Najwyższy Czas!**. Both websites were managed by Polish media company **5S MEDIA SP. Z.O.O.**. In addition, recurrent names emerged.
- Publicly available registers revealed that of some of these individuals, were also **6S MEDIA SP. Z.O.O.** shareholders, the media company that managed FL24
- One of the names was involved in a Polish **troll farm** (**Cat@Net**) previously investigated by The Guardian.



wolnosc24.pl

WYDAWCA WOLNOSC24.PL: 5S Media Sp. z o.o. (ul. Święcickiego 14, 01-614 Warszawa). NIP: 5252676432, KRS: 0000637269, REGON: 365416025. REDAKTOR NACZELNY: Tomasz S. ██████████ ZASTĘPCA REDAKTORA NACZELNEGO: Adam W. ██████████ REDAKTOR PROWADZĄCY: Radosław P. ██████████, Andrzej F. ██████████, Maciej S. ██████████

E-MAIL: redakcja@nczas.com.pl. TELEFON: (0048) 731 555 039

Najwyższy Czas!
nczas.com

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- Since our investigation (January 2020), FL24 continues to operate
- Over 40k Facebook followers
- Paid for ads targeting France and Canada (Facebook ad library)

Filter By: France ▼ Active and Inactive ▼ All Impressions ▼

Launched September 2019

● Active
Started running on Sep 13, 2019
ID: 529054254322372

 FranceLibre24.net
Sponsored

FL24.net - cliquez "J'aime la Page" (en bas à droite) si vous aimez l'info libre



FranceLibre24.net
Media News Company
15,654 people like this

Like Page

COUNTERMEASURES AGAINST DISINFORMATION

1. Documenting the threat
 2. Raise awareness about findings
 3. Repairing the weakness
 - Disinformation focuses on existing social fractures
 - Solutions include media literacy and regulation
 4. Punishing and deterring the aggressor (naming and shaming, sanctions)
- Resource-intensive