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ANALYSIS OF RELATIONS BETWEEN THE BALTIC STATES AND THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION IN THE CONTEXT OF ENERGY SECURITY

Zehra AKSU

Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Hatay Mustafa Kemal Üniversitesi,
Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü, zehra.aksu@mku.edu.tr

0000-0003-1073-4086

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Abstract

The energy relationship between the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) and the Russian Federation is a critical factor influencing regional security. This relationship is key to understanding how energy dependency impacts national security and regional stability. Historically interconnected through shared Soviet infrastructure, the Baltic States have sought to reduce their reliance on Russian energy sources in response to security concerns, aiming to synchronise with the Continental European Network. The experiences of the Baltic States in energy security serve as a significant example of small states striving to escape the influence of major powers and develop independent energy policies. This paper aims to analyse the relations between the Baltic States and the Russian Federation within the context of energy security. The research question is which strategic orientations the Baltic States have adopted in response to the security risks arising from their historical energy dependence on Russia. The hypothesis of the study is that the energy security strategies of the Baltic States have been directly shaped by the security concerns arising from their dependence on Russian energy, and that this has functioned as a driving force accelerating their EU integration processes. The study synthesises recent policy changes and infrastructure developments affecting energy security in the Baltic region, offering original insights. By placing contemporary developments within a broader historical and geopolitical framework, it enriches the literature and provides foresight for future policy assessments. The study which examines scientific publications, policy reports, and data from government sources, concludes that Baltic-Russian energy relations are characterised by a struggle between dependence and strategic decoupling. Based on historical and contemporary evidence obtained through qualitative research methods, it is assessed that while significant steps have been taken towards diversification and EU integration, the legacy of past dependency continues to influence modern energy strategies and security assessments.

Keywords: Energy Security, Baltic States, Russian Federation, EU

BALTİK DEVLETLERİ VE RUSYA FEDERASYONU ARASINDAKİ İLİŞKİLERİN ENERJİ GÜVENLİĞİ BAĞLAMINDA ANALİZİ

Öz

Baltık Devletleri (Estonya, Letonya ve Litvanya) ile Rusya Federasyonu arasındaki enerji ilişkisi, bölgesel güvenliği etkileyen kritik bir unsurdur. Bu ilişki, enerji bağımlılığının ulusal güvenliği ve bölgesel istikrarı nasıl etkilediğini anlamak için önemlidir. Paylaşılan Sovyet altyapısı nedeniyle tarihsel olarak iç içe geçmiş olan Baltık devletleri, güvenlik endişelerine yanıt olarak Rus enerji kaynaklarına olan bağımlılığı azaltmaya çalışmakta ve Kıta Avrupası Ağı ile senkronizasyonu amaçlamaktadır. Baltık Devletlerinin enerji güvenliği konusundaki deneyimleri, küçük devletlerin büyük güçlerin etkisinden kurtulma ve bağımsız enerji politikaları geliştirme çabalarına önemli bir örnek teşkil etmektedir. Bu çalışma Baltık Devletleri ve Rusya Federasyonu arasındaki ilişkilerin enerji güvenliği bağlamında analizini amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma sorusu, Baltık Devletlerinin Rusya karşısındaki tarihsel enerji bağımlılığından kaynaklanan güvenlik risklerine yanıt olarak enerji güvenliğini sağlamak amacıyla hangi stratejik yönelimleri benimsediğidir. Çalışmanın hipotezi Baltık Devletlerinin enerji güvenliği stratejilerinin, Rusya'ya olan enerji bağımlılığının yarattığı güvenlik kaygılarından doğrudan etkilendiği ve bu durumun, AB entegrasyon süreçlerini hızlandıran bir itici güç işlevi gördüğüdür. Çalışma, Baltık bölgesinde enerji güvenliğini etkileyen son politika değişimlerini ve altyapı gelişmelerini sentezleyerek özgün içgörüler sunmaktadır. Çağdaş gelişmeleri daha geniş bir tarihsel ve jeopolitik çerçeveye yerleştirerek literatürü zenginleştirmekte ve gelecekteki politika değerlendirmeleri için öngörüler kazandırmaktadır. Bilimsel eserlerin, politika raporlarının ve hükümet kaynaklarından elde edilen verilerin incelendiği araştırmada, Baltık-Rusya enerji ilişkilerinin bağımlılık ve stratejik kopuş arasındaki bir mücadele ile karakterize edildiği sonucuna ulaşılmaktadır. Nitel araştırma yöntemiyle elde edilen tarihsel ve güncel kanıtlara göre; çeşitlilik ve AB entegrasyonuna doğru önemli adımlar atılmış olsa da geçmiş bağımlılığın mirasının, modern enerji stratejilerini ve güvenlik değerlendirmelerini etkilemeye devam ettiği değerlendirilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Enerji Güvenliği, Baltık Devletleri, Rusya Federasyonu, AB

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between the Baltic States and the Russian Federation has remarkable importance in the context of energy security. Although Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania gained their independence with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, they carried the legacy of the Soviet era in their energy infrastructure and policies for many years. Due to their geographical location at a strategic crossroads in northeastern Europe, these states find themselves at the centre of geopolitical tensions, given their proximity both to Western alliances and directly to Russia. This situation influences the Baltic States' energy policies in relation to Russian influence and EU energy strategies, directly impacting their energy security. Consequently, the energy policies of the Baltic States are shaped by two fundamental dynamics: the Soviet legacy and integration with the EU.

Having been directly connected to Russia through the energy infrastructure established during the Soviet era, the Baltic States prioritised breaking free from this dependence in the post-independence period. To enhance energy diversification and prevent Russia from using its energy resources as a tool of pressure, they initiated infrastructure projects such as the Klaipėda LNG terminal. Becoming increasingly aware of the strategic risks associated with reliance on a single supplier, the Baltic States secured support from the EU to implement their energy projects. Geopolitically, the Baltic States' location has also influenced their economic strategies, prompting them to diversify their energy sources and align their policies with the EU's energy security frameworks. However, their adoption of strategies emphasising regional cooperation and integration with Western alliances to mitigate vulnerabilities has heightened the risk of tensions with their eastern neighbors. The Baltic States' pivot towards Western alliances has, in turn, reinforced Moscow's efforts to maintain control over its energy resources. In this context, Russia's development of infrastructure projects such as Nord Stream,

which bypass the Baltic States, has transformed energy security from a national issue for these countries into a broader regional concern.

This study addresses the ongoing energy security challenges faced by the Baltic States due to their historical dependence on Russia and examines the strategies they have adopted to achieve energy independence. Seeking to answer the question of how successful the Baltic States have been in reducing their energy dependence on Russia, the paper analyses the complex energy relations between the Baltic States and the Russian Federation. It aims to analyse how these relations have evolved against the backdrop of political tensions and the strategic objective of energy diversification, and it evaluates the progress made by the Baltic States towards energy independence as well as the challenges they have encountered. In this regard, the study provides an integrated analysis that links historical dependence with contemporary energy security challenges, enhancing the understanding of energy not only as an economic tool but also as a geopolitical instrument. To provide a comprehensive historical and analytical account, the paper draws on policy reports, academic articles, and official government documents, and therefore employs a qualitative research method. Its originality lies in its interdisciplinary approach, which bridges history and political economy to offer a nuanced understanding of energy dependence. While energy security is often examined through the lens of major powers, this study fills a significant gap in the literature by focusing on the energy security strategies of small states. It not only addresses current energy policies, but also takes into account the historical energy dependence inherited from the Soviet legacy, thereby revealing the impact of structural factors on present-day security strategies. In doing so, the study not only establishes a link between energy security and regional security, but also reinforces the emphasis on historical continuity within the energy security literature. By deepening the energy security literature through a regional case study, the study contributes to the field by contextualising Baltic-Russian energy relations within contemporary geopolitical discourse.

1. THE BALTIC STATES FROM A GEOPOLITICAL AND GEOSTRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE

Geographically named after the Baltic Sea, which gives its name to the region in the west and north, the Baltic countries consist of three countries: Estonia in the north, Latvia in the central part, and Lithuania in the south. Gaining independence with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Baltic States are located in northeastern Europe. They are bordered by Poland and Kaliningrad (a Russian exclave) to the southwest, Russia to the east, and Belarus to the southeast. These countries share historical and geographical ties and rank among the smallest five post-Soviet states in terms of both land area and population.

Table 1. Areas and Populations of the Baltic States

Country	Area (km ²)	Population (million)
Lithuania	65.300	2.794
Latvia	64.589	1.92
Estonia	45.227	1.325
Total	175.116	6.039

Source: This table was prepared by the author of the study using data from the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye.

Among the Baltic States, Lithuania is the largest, with a land area of 65,300 km² and a population of 2.794 million. It is followed by Latvia, which has a land area of 64,589 km² and a population of 1.92 million, and Estonia, with a land area of 45,227 km² and a

population of 1.325 million (see Table 1). Although these states collectively cover a relatively small geographical area of 175,116 km², their strategic location has consistently drawn the attention of powerful neighboring countries. The history of the Baltic States has been shaped by both the ambitions of strong neighboring powers seeking to occupy the region and their own struggles for independence (Lorot, 1991: 7). Having lived under Soviet rule for many years, the three states finally achieved independence in 1991 as a result of their historical struggle. Now sovereign nation-states, the Baltic countries have often been regarded as a buffer zone or grey area due to their position as a transit corridor between two major civilisations-Russia and Europe.

For centuries, the Baltic States have been at the center of conflicts between East and West. Due to their historical ties, geographical location, and political and economic structures, they are regarded as key political, economic, and security partners for both Russia and the EU and NATO. Positioned at a crossroads between Western alliances and Russian influence, the Baltic States play a vital role in European security, energy diversification, and regional stability. In this context, they are of extreme importance to NATO, the EU, and Russia, each of which has distinct yet interconnected interests in the region.

For the EU, the Baltic States represent a frontier of European democratic values and market economies, strengthening the Union's stability and cohesion. Historically dependent on Russian gas, the Baltic region has been at the centre of the EU's efforts to reduce reliance on Russian energy and enhance energy resilience. The Baltic Energy Market Interconnection Plan (BEMIP) is one of the EU's flagship initiatives aimed at integrating the Baltic energy market with the rest of Europe. According to Aalto (2016: 219), this integration includes projects such as the Klaipėda LNG terminal in Lithuania, which allows gas imports from various global suppliers and helps reduce dependence on Russian gas (European Commission, 2020: 11).

For NATO, the Baltic States serve as a crucial buffer against potential Russian aggression toward Western Europe, making them indispensable to NATO's eastern flank. They play a critical frontline role in the Alliance's defensive posture against possible Russian hostilities. The Baltic States represent both a geopolitical challenge and a key component of NATO's eastern defense strategy. Frear (2018: 142) highlights that these states are geographically positioned on NATO's most vulnerable flank, making them central to the Alliance's collective defence strategy. In this context, according to Hyde-Price (2025: 6), the presence of the Baltic States in NATO not only deters aggression but also enables the Alliance to conduct military exercises that strengthen regional stability. NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP), launched in 2017, demonstrated the Alliance's commitment to the region's defense by deploying multinational battlegroups in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

For Russia, the Baltic States represent a region of historical and strategic importance, where it seeks to maintain its influence and counter NATO and EU expansion. Situated on Russia's western border and within its historical sphere of influence, the Baltic States are crucial to Russia's security and foreign policy objectives. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the integration of these states into the EU and NATO has heightened strategic complexities in the region, creating a security dilemma for Russia. Because militarily, the Baltic States are located near key Russian assets, such as the Baltic Fleet and advanced missile systems stationed in the Kaliningrad exclave. Furthermore, the Baltic region holds significant economic importance for Russia, particularly in terms of energy transit and trade. In this context, the geopolitical position of the Baltic States is vital to Russia's strategic depth, serving as a buffer zone between Russian territory and NATO. This regional dynamic not only shapes Russia's military strategy but also influences its diplomatic and political approach towards the region.

NATO, the EU, and Russia's perspectives on the Baltic States provide a detailed understanding of their strategic significance. For NATO, the Baltic region serves as a forward defence line, strengthening deterrence against potential Russian aggression. For the EU, it is essential for energy diversification and political stability in Eastern Europe. Meanwhile, for Russia, the Baltic States are part of its "near abroad", where it seeks to maintain influence and counter Western expansion (Berg and Ehin, 2016: 51). NATO and the EU have different but interconnected interests in the region. Both organisations share a common objective in stabilising the Baltic States, enhancing their resilience against external threats, and integrating them into Western security and economic structures. For both NATO and the EU, the Baltic region represents a critical defence line and a symbol of solidarity with Eastern European allies (Kasekamp, 2018: 110). Conversely, Russia's interests largely conflict with those of NATO and the EU, as it seeks to preserve its influence in the region and prevent further Western encroachment near its borders. For Russia, maintaining a degree of influence over the Baltic States is crucial for securing access to the Baltic Sea and shielding its northwestern flank from Western influence (Palavenis, 2024: 16). Russia's approach to the Baltic States reflects its broader strategy in Eastern Europe, which involves hybrid tactics, energy leverage, and military posturing to maintain its sphere of influence.

Consequently historically, the Baltic region has been marked by fragility due to its limited strategic depth. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania occupy a geopolitically significant position along the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea, attracting the intense interest of major powers with strategic stakes in the region. According to Mahnken (2020: 78), the regional vulnerability of the Baltic States is further heightened by the Suwalki Gap, a narrow corridor between Lithuania and Poland that serves as a critical access route for NATO forces. Located at the intersection of Western and Russian spheres of influence, these countries have adopted strategies that emphasise regional cooperation and integration with Western alliances to mitigate their vulnerabilities (Baharççek and Ağır, 2015: 42-43). However, these strategies also increase the risk of rising tensions with their eastern neighbours, necessitating a careful balance between deterrence and diplomacy.

2. HISTORICAL DEPENDENCE IN ENERGY RELATIONS BETWEEN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AND THE BALTIC STATES

Known for their lack of wealth in non-renewable energy resources (see Table 2), the Baltic States are almost entirely dependent on Russia for energy. However, despite having no significant proven reserves of energy resources, these countries serve as an important transit region due to their geopolitical and geostrategic location.

Table 2. Fossil Energy Reserves of the Baltic States

Country	Coal	Oil	Natural Gas
Lithuania	-	2,49 million tonnes	-
Latvia	-	-	-
Estonia	-	1,1 billion tonnes	-

Source: Estonia's Oil Shale Industry, 2021; Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2021; EIA, 2024.

The Baltic States, home to several major ports, play a key role in the transportation of oil via these ports and natural gas via pipelines. Among the most significant ports are Muuga (Estonia), Riga, Liepaja, and Ventspils (Latvia), as well as Klaipėda, Butinge (oil processing terminal), and Vievis (Lithuania). Additionally, the region hosts an oil refinery in Mazeikiai (Lithuania). The Baltic region is of great importance to Russia, as some of the most critical

routes for transporting Russian oil and gas to Europe pass through this area, as well as through Belarus, which shares a border with Latvia and Lithuania. Due to its ports, the region serves as a gateway to Europe, further enhancing its strategic significance. Given these factors, a detailed analysis of the Baltic States is essential.

The first of the Baltic States, Lithuania shares borders with Kaliningrad (Russia), Latvia, and Belarus. Lithuania's gas transmission and distribution network consists of approximately 2,000 kilometres of transmission pipelines and an 8,300-kilometre distribution network, which is connected to the gas systems of Latvia, Russia's Kaliningrad region, and Belarus (Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Lithuania, 2021). Originally constructed in 1961, these pipelines are largely a legacy of the Soviet era, as Lithuania, along with other regional countries, relied on Russia to meet its energy needs during the Soviet period. The gas supply chain was designed to transport Russian gas to Belarus, then to Lithuania, and from there to Kaliningrad, which has no direct pipeline connection to Belarus. Following Lithuanian independence, this system remained in operation. Additionally, a cross-border gas interconnection between Lithuania and Latvia has facilitated bidirectional gas transportation (Amber Grid, 2021). Since 1991, the Baltic States have prioritised the development of new energy projects to complement existing infrastructure and enhance energy security.

In the post-independence period, the Lithuanian government, with support from the EU, constructed an LNG terminal in 2014. Located in the southern section of the Klaipėda Port, this terminal was developed to provide an alternative natural gas supply source, aiming to enhance energy security not only for Lithuania but also for the other Baltic States. At the time, Lithuania's sole gas supplier was Gazprom, a Russian company with a monopoly over the country's gas market. To break Gazprom's dominance, the Lithuanian government signed a supply agreement with the Norwegian energy company Statoil following the construction of the LNG terminal. This agreement introduced Statoil as an alternative supplier to Lithuania's gas market, reducing reliance on Russian energy (Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Lithuania, 2021).

Recognised as one of Lithuania's most critical energy security facilities, the LNG terminal consists of the "Independence" floating storage and regasification unit (FSRU), as well as a quay and a gas pipeline. In addition to its structural advantages, it is noteworthy that this LNG terminal was the first in the Baltic Sea region to contribute to energy security and is located in a non-freezing port, allowing year-round operation. Another key feature of the terminal is that it enabled Lithuania to break free from Gazprom's monopoly on natural gas for the first time. Furthermore, thanks to this LNG facility, Lithuania is now capable of supplying gas to Latvia and Estonia, enhancing regional energy security. Additionally, Klaipėda, where the LNG terminal is located, is also home to an oil terminal built in 1964. Known as the Subačius oil terminal, this facility is one of the most modern and rapidly developing oil terminals on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea. Its primary function is the handling, storage, and transportation of oil sourced from Lithuania, Russia, Belarus, and other oil refineries, as well as its transfer to customers' facilities via tankers and/or rail tank cars. As a highly significant terminal, Subačius plays a crucial role in ensuring the safe and efficient transport of oil and petroleum products (KN, 2021).

Another important oil terminal is located in Būtingė, where operations similar to those at Subačius are carried out. The construction of this terminal was driven by the aim of reducing the dependence of the Mazeikiai oil refinery on Russian oil. Equipped with modern technology, the terminal began receiving support from Western states during its project phase. The project was financed by international financial institutions and constructed by Western companies (Vardys and Slaven, 1996: 216). The Mazeikiai oil refinery in Lithuania has an

annual capacity of 12 million tonnes and holds the distinction of being the only oil refinery among the Baltic States (Sarna, 2003: 31-36).

Another Baltic country, Latvia, has a natural gas system that is connected to Lithuania, Belarus, and Russia. Latvia remains an important transit country for Russian natural gas exports. Notably, the country hosts the Inčukalns underground gas storage facility, which plays a crucial role in meeting increased European energy demand during winter months. This facility is the only gas storage site in the Baltic States (EIA, 2014). Additionally, Latvia has several key ports that house oil terminals. The most important of these is Ventspils, where large quantities of oil and other mineral resources transported via pipeline from Russia are loaded onto ships and tankers. Constructed during the Soviet era (1968), Ventspils serves as the final terminal of the Volga-Ural crude oil pipeline and has the capacity to accommodate three large ocean tankers simultaneously (Dreifelds, 1996: 137). However, Russia has sought to reduce Ventspils' importance in order to bypass the Baltic States for its energy transit routes. To this end, Russia opened its own Baltic terminal in Primorsk, aiming to eliminate Ventspils from its export supply program. Nevertheless, Russia's infrastructure and terminal capacity remains insufficient, preventing it from fully realising this objective. The opening of the Primorsk terminal has only led to a limited decline in the volume of energy transported via Ventspils. As a result, Ventspils remains strategically important for Russia, which continues efforts to regain control over the terminal, much like it had during the Soviet era (Paszyc, 2003: 25).

Following Ventspils, other key oil terminals are located in Riga and Liepaja, both of which were also constructed during the Soviet era. Similar to Ventspils, which became an integral part of the Soviet oil pipeline system, these terminals are crucial for Latvia, as they can operate year-round and are well connected to neighboring countries via an extensive railway network (Dreifelds, 1996: 136).

Among the Baltic States, Estonia is the smallest country, but it serves as an important transit hub for Russian oil exports via the Baltic Sea. Its most significant ports are Tallinn and Muuga, from which oil is exported to global markets (EIA, 2015). Oil is transported by rail (342 km) from Moscow, Russia, to Tallinn, where it is then loaded onto ships and tankers for further export. Like the other Baltic States, Estonia remains heavily dependent on Russia for energy and is actively seeking ways to reduce its reliance on Russian gas and oil. However, Russia's influence over Estonia's energy sector remains strong. Notably, Gazprom owns a 37.02% stake in Eesti Gaas, the country's only known energy company (Kalev, 2012).

In conclusion, the energy relationship between the Baltic States and the Russian Federation is a critical factor influencing regional security. The Baltic States' role as an energy transit hub was shaped during the Soviet era when infrastructure directly connected them to Russian supply networks. Their historical dependence on Russian energy has constrained policy choices and impacted their long-term energy security. Even after independence, this structural positioning continued to shape energy policies, placing the Baltic States in a complex web of dependence and strategic opportunities (Smith, 2019: 67; Andžāns, 2022: 5). While the transit of energy resources through the Baltic States has provided economic benefits and strategic leverage, it has also exposed the region to geopolitical risks, particularly from Russia. Due to their shared Soviet-era infrastructure, these states have historically been interwoven in energy networks but have since sought to reduce their reliance on Russian energy as a response to security concerns. This is because Russia's use of energy as a geopolitical tool—through periodic supply disruptions and price manipulation aimed at exerting leverage—has further exacerbated their vulnerabilities (Andžāns, 2022: 5). This dependence has been not only infrastructural but also economic, as Russia has often maintained its influence in the region by supplying energy at preferential rates (Conley et al., 2016: 19). These developments have, in turn, driven policy shifts aimed at reducing Russian influence.

Since the early 2000s, the Baltic States have prioritised energy diversification to mitigate the risks associated with dependence on Russian resources. The Baltic Energy Market Interconnection Plan (BEMIP), launched by the EU in 2008, has played a crucial role in supporting the Baltic States' transition towards energy independence. BEMIP aimed to integrate the Baltic States into the wider European energy network and develop key infrastructure projects such as the NordBalt submarine cable linking Lithuania and Sweden, as well as the EstLink cables connecting Estonia and Finland (Center for European Policy Studies, 2020: 14). Lithuania has taken the lead in decisive action, establishing the Klaipėda LNG terminal in 2014, which allowed for independent gas imports. In other words, this facility enabled LNG imports from global markets, significantly breaking Russia's near-monopoly on gas supplies to the region (Andžāns, 2022: 12). Despite the challenges of coordinating such projects at a regional level, this move underlined Lithuania's commitment to energy security (Ponars Eurasia, 2020: 16). Additional projects, such as the Balticconnector pipeline and the Poland-Lithuania Gas Interconnection (GIPL), have further diversified energy routes and enhanced regional resilience (European Commission, 2018: 24)

Indeed, these infrastructure developments have helped reduce direct dependence on Russian resources and facilitated the integration of the Baltic States into the European energy network. However, despite this progress, regional cooperation has often been hindered by diverging national interests and political fragmentation. The inconsistent coordination among the Baltic States has affected geopolitical dynamics and energy security strategies. Disagreements over joint infrastructure projects, such as the allocation of LNG terminals, have complicated unified action and exposed competing national interests. The Klaipėda LNG terminal is a notable example, as Lithuania proceeded unilaterally after failed trilateral negotiations, highlighting divisions among the Baltic States (Andžāns, 2022: 5-8). This was largely due to internal political and economic pressures in Latvia and Estonia, which slowed progress. While significant steps have been taken towards energy diversification and EU integration, it is evident that the Baltic States' historical dependence on Russia continues to shape energy policy decisions, influence security strategies, and impact economic policies.

3. THE ENERGY SECURITY DIMENSION OF RELATIONS BETWEEN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AND THE BALTIC STATES: CURRENT SITUATION AND STRATEGIC EXPECTATIONS

Energy security has long been a critical concern in the relationship between the Baltic States and the Russian Federation. The energy ties between Russia and the Baltic States are rooted in Soviet-era infrastructure and trade dependencies, where Moscow centrally controlled energy policies (Smith, 2019: 117). During the Soviet period, the energy infrastructure in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania was primarily designed to serve Soviet interests, integrating the Baltic States into Moscow-centred networks for natural gas, oil, and electricity (Gavrilis, 2009: 87). This structure fostered continued extensive dependence after independence, as Russian companies maintained significant control over energy resources. According to Perovic (2015: 291), this dependency also hindered the economic autonomy of the Baltic States, which lacked the necessary infrastructure to secure alternative energy sources. As a result, even after gaining independence in 1991, the Baltic States remained heavily reliant on Russia for their energy needs. According to Smith (2008: 121–123), this dependence has rendered the energy security of the Baltic States highly vulnerable to external risks.

Russian energy companies, particularly Gazprom, have continued to dominate the Baltic energy markets through ownership stakes and supply contracts (Kruk, 2014: 45). For example, Gazprom's control over gas distribution networks in Latvia and Lithuania has provided Russia with significant leverage over these countries (Locatelli, 2018: 134). This dependency has posed a security risk, as Russia has periodically used energy pricing and supply as a tool of

political influence (Galbreath, 2018: 142). Beyond restricting the foreign policy options of the Baltic States, this dependence has also limited their ability to openly oppose Russian interests (McGlynn, 2021: 96). Despite their significant reliance on Russian energy, the Baltic States have continued using Soviet-era transmission and infrastructure systems. While some EU-backed projects, such as LNG terminals, have been pursued after the Soviet period, the Baltic States have prioritised energy diversification -especially since the early 2000s- to reduce the risks associated with Russian energy dependence. Meanwhile, Russia has focused on implementing transit projects that bypass these countries.

The most notable example of Russia's bypass strategy is the Nord Stream pipeline. This pipeline begins in Vyborg, Russia, and extends under the Baltic Sea to Greifswald, Germany. Commissioned in 2011, the pipeline has reduced the role of the Baltic States and Ukraine as transit countries. Gazprom stated that this route "has made it possible to bypass unpredictable transit countries" (Gazprom, 2012). Pipelines such as the Nord Stream projects, which bypass the Baltic States, have increased the risk of regional isolation and brought energy security back onto the agenda not only as a technical issue but also as a strategic one (Hancock and Vivoda, 2014: 339-341).

One of the main reasons behind Russia's desire to bypass the Baltic States is their accession to both the EU and NATO in 2004. Concerned about EU and NATO expansion eastward, Russia has, since 2004, repeatedly violated Baltic airspace, cancelled the Russia-Estonia border treaty, imposed economic sanctions on imports from Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, and conducted cyber intrusions into the Baltic digital sphere (Karabeshkin, 2007: 157-161; Mankof, 2014). Viewing the Baltic States' NATO and EU membership as a threat to its "near abroad" doctrine, Russia has not hesitated to use its energy resources as a weapon against these countries, whose revenues are heavily dependent on energy transit. The most striking example of this was seen in Lithuania, which had pursued pro-EU policies and taken a leading role in decisive energy security actions. While fuel price reductions were granted to Estonia and Latvia, Lithuania was excluded from these benefits. This was largely due to Lithuania's significant steps towards energy diversification, particularly its integration of Norway as an alternative energy supplier. Moreover, Lithuania did not pursue this project solely for its own benefit but emphasised that it aimed to enable other Baltic States to benefit from it as well. According to Ponars Eurasia (2020: 16), this move highlighted Lithuania's commitment to energy security, despite the challenges of coordinating such projects at a regional level.

During the LNG project, Lithuania received support from EU countries and stated that Russian energy giant Gazprom had been abusing its market dominance to Lithuania's disadvantage, which was why it established the LNG terminal. Additionally, the Lithuanian government stated that they were punished with higher gas prices for seeking to reduce their dependence on Russian energy, claiming that Russia charged them the highest gas prices among EU countries. Prioritising the reduction of energy vulnerability, Lithuania declared itself independent from Russian gas imports by 2022. However, the synchronisation of its electricity grids with the Continental European Network (CEN) has yet to be completed. The Klaipėda LNG terminal project also highlighted regional divisions, as Lithuania ultimately acted unilaterally following failed trilateral negotiations. Meanwhile, Latvia and Estonia faced domestic political and economic pressures that slowed progress. In Latvia, Latvijas Gāze, a partially Gazprom-owned gas company, opposed cutting off Russian gas supplies due to concerns over potential economic consequences (Andžāns, 2022: 6). While such opposition highlighted the complexity of balancing economic interests with strategic necessities, it also led Estonia and Latvia to propose similar plans following Lithuania's example, aiming to ensure a stable energy future and minimise geopolitical risks.

Various projects, including the construction of new pipelines between regional states, have been proposed. Some of these projects include the establishment of new pipelines between Estonia and Finland, as well as between Poland and Lithuania, along with the expansion of pipelines between Latvia and Lithuania, extending them to Klaipėda. These initiatives, promoted by EU countries, aim to reduce the Baltic States' dependence on Gazprom. The EU's objective has been to enhance cooperation among the region's states. Recognising the importance of these projects, the EU has pledged to cover half of the costs if they are successfully implemented (Persily, 2012; Brelie and Hacisalihoğlu, 2015). However, despite all these diversification projects, Lithuania remains dependent on Gazprom. While regional states seek to end Gazprom's monopoly, Gazprom aims to maintain its advantageous position in the region (Myhre, 2012). Historical dependence continues to shape energy policy decisions, influence security strategies, and impact economic policies.

On one hand, Russia continues to manage its relations with regional states, while on the other, it is working to implement new projects that it believes could serve as alternatives to Lithuania's LNG project. One such project is the Baltic LNG project, currently under construction in Ust-Luga, in the Leningrad region.

The facility, set to be operated by Gazprom and Shell, will process ethane-containing gas extracted by Gazprom from the Achimov and Valanginian fields in the Nadym-Pur-Taz region. The agreement was signed in 2017, and construction began in 2019, with completion targeted for late 2024. The complex is expected to have the largest gas processing capacity in Russia and to become the largest LNG production facility in northwestern Europe. In addition to this project, Russia launched another initiative in 2019: a floating storage and regasification unit (FSRU) in the Baltic Sea, designed to supply LNG to the Kaliningrad region. Named Marshall Vasilevskiy, this FSRU facility was developed to enhance Kaliningrad's energy security, considering the region's geographical position. Situated at a depth of approximately 19 metres and 5 kilometres off the coast, it is Russia's only FSRU. The ship transporting LNG (with a reservoir capacity of 174,000 cubic metres) carries out regasification, converting the liquefied gas back into its gaseous form to meet Kaliningrad's energy needs. In other words, through the Marshall Vasilevskiy FSRU, Russia aims to reduce Kaliningrad's reliance on transit routes via the Baltic States and Belarus by providing an alternative energy supply project. Thus, both the Baltic LNG project and the Marshall Vasilevskiy FSRU demonstrate Russia's efforts to establish key alternative energy projects in the region (Gazprom, 2021).

The issue of strategic dependence on natural gas is not limited to this resource alone for the Baltic States; a similar situation remains valid with regard to oil supply. The Russian Federation pursues a dual strategy towards these pro-Western oriented states: on the one hand, it seeks to reduce its transit dependence in energy exports to Europe, while on the other, it aims to prevent the three Baltic countries from fully breaking away from its geopolitical sphere of influence. In line with this goal, Russia imposes punitive pricing policies on the Baltic States and maintains its strategic pressure on energy by establishing alternative routes, such as the Nord Stream projects, that bypass these countries. In doing so, Russia also uses the Kaliningrad region, located on the Baltic Sea coast, almost as a military base to safeguard its own energy infrastructure. According to Hancock and Vivoda (2014: 340–341), the military capacity of Kaliningrad serves not only as a tool of physical deterrence but also as a means of psychological and diplomatic pressure in the context of energy security.

In conclusion, energy relations between the Baltic States and Russia are not solely economic in nature but are shaped by a historical strategic dependence influenced by political crises and reform processes. Although significant steps have been taken in recent years toward diversification of energy sources and EU integration, the legacy of past dependence continues to influence contemporary energy strategies and security assessments. This historical legacy not

only increases the Baltic States' vulnerability to external threats but also limits their capacity for long-term strategic planning in the energy sector. Aware of this fragility, the Baltic countries are pursuing multifaceted policies to enhance their energy security, including legal reforms, the diversification of energy sources, and the development of international energy partnerships. However, the success of this process depends not only on technical and economic capacity but also on the alignment of national interests and the level of regional coordination. Existing data indicate that occasional political disagreements among the Baltic States have undermined efforts to transform energy security into a collective goal. The balance between securing energy resources and maintaining economic stability remains a persistent challenge. The lack of consistent coordination among the Baltic States, combined with Russia's policies aimed at maintaining its dominant position in the energy market, continues to hinder the pursuit of full energy independence. The high costs of infrastructure and the technical complexities of moving away from established systems make EU support essential.

While the EU provides significant financial and technical support, national budget constraints and various regional interests have slowed the pace of full implementation. Proximity to Russia and ongoing geopolitical tensions remain key factors shaping the Baltic States' energy policies. Cyber threats, economic pressure, and potential military risks further complicate the energy security landscape. Although the Baltic States have made substantial progress in diversifying energy sources and integrating into the EU energy network, challenges persist. Achieving long-term energy security will require continued cooperation and investment in resilient infrastructure. Ensuring long-term energy security depends not only on investments in physical infrastructure, but also on institutional alignment, regional cooperation, the transition to renewable energy, and the implementation of resilience-oriented strategic planning.

CONCLUSION

The energy relations between the Baltic States and the Russian Federation have undergone a significant transformation, shifting from historical dependence to strategic independence. The energy infrastructure inherited from the Soviet era meant that, following independence, the Baltic States remained heavily reliant on Russia for their energy needs. However, this dependence enabled the use of energy as a geopolitical tool, posing a threat to their energy security. The centralised energy infrastructure inherited from the Soviet era left these states highly vulnerable to external risks in terms of energy security. In particular, Russia's use of energy resources as a tool of foreign policy prompted the Baltic States to redefine energy security as an integral part of national security. Following independence, the Baltic States adopted a strategy based on diversification and integration to achieve energy independence.

The energy security strategies of the Baltic States have been shaped around diversification and integration into European energy markets, with the aim of reducing dependence on Russia. This strategic transformation has focused not only on diversifying supply sources, but also on reducing infrastructure dependency and enhancing resilience in decision-making processes against external influences. Infrastructure projects such as the Klaipėda LNG terminal, the Balticconnector, and the Poland–Lithuania gas pipeline have laid the physical foundations for this transition. These efforts to break Russia's gas monopoly have gradually reduced the Baltic States' dependency. Moreover, these projects have contributed not only to improving energy supply security but also to becoming part of the EU's broader energy resilience strategies.

Strategic steps supporting regional integration for energy independence have been important role for enhancing energy security in the Baltic States. The EU has supported the Baltic States' efforts toward energy independence by providing both financial and technical assistance, playing a critical role in this process. Integration into the European energy grid has been considered a key step in strengthening the energy security of the Baltic countries. However, the strategic initiatives aimed at achieving energy independence have not been implemented without difficulties. In particular, occasional coordination gaps among the Baltic States highlight the fragility of regional solidarity. For example, Lithuania's LNG infrastructure investments have not always been synchronised with those of the other Baltic States. This situation illustrates how even among small states, energy policies are shaped by national interests and underscores the challenges of institutionalising a collective energy security goal. At the same time, Russia has perceived the Baltic States' pursuit of energy independence as a threat and has continued to use energy resources as a means of pressure. Russia's energy policies toward the Baltic region have not been limited to economic coercion but have also been reinforced with military presence and security threats, creating a multifaceted geopolitical pressure. Projects such as the Nord Stream pipelines, which bypass the Baltic States, have increased the risk of regional isolation and brought energy security back onto the agenda not only as a technical concern but also as a strategic issue.

In this geopolitical climate, the Baltic States have not only focused on short-term supply security measures but have also turned toward long-term sustainable energy strategies. Investments in renewable energy, energy efficiency policies, and the integration of digital infrastructure demonstrate that energy security is not only about reducing dependency, but also about building resilience and adaptability.

In conclusion, strategically located between the major European powers and the Russian Federation, the Baltic States have long been at the centre of regional power dynamics. As they move from a position of being caught between East and West toward strategic autonomy, the Baltic States have redefined energy security not merely as a technical issue, but as one directly linked to national sovereignty, economic development, and regional stability.

Striving to balance Western integration with Eastern geopolitical pressures, the Baltic States have made significant progress on the path to energy independence. However, further efforts are required to ensure that this progress is sustainable. Strengthening regional cooperation, investing in renewable energy sources, and achieving full integration into the European energy grid stand out as key elements for enhancing the Baltic States' energy security. Nevertheless, their geographical proximity to Russia and persistent geopolitical tensions make it necessary for the Baltic States to strike a careful balance between deterrence and resilience in their energy policies. While integration into Western political and military alliances enhances their stability, it simultaneously escalates geopolitical tensions with Russia.

Indeed, the Baltic States' experience in energy security serves as a significant example of how small states can navigate great power influence and develop independent energy policies. In this context, the energy security strategies of the Baltic States are directly shaped by the security concerns arising from their dependence on the Russian Federation, and this has acted as a driving force accelerating their EU integration processes. These strategies are considered not only as efforts to ensure energy supply security, but also within the broader framework of national sovereignty, political stability, and the construction of economic resilience. The Baltic States' multidimensional strategic adaptations to energy dependence offer significant contributions to the energy security literature, both conceptually and empirically. The energy strategies of these countries offer valuable lessons not only for their own region but also for

global energy policy. Efforts to ensure energy security not only support economic development but also remain crucial as a means of reinforcing national independence. As long-term energy security can only be achieved through sustained regional cooperation, investment in innovative technologies, and international support, the Baltic States' efforts in this area clearly demonstrate that energy security must be understood not only as a technical issue, but also as a geopolitical one.

GENİŞ ÖZET

Enerji güvenliği, dış tedarikçilere bağımlı olan ülkeler için yalnız ekonomik bir mesele olmanın ötesinde, ulusal egemenliğin korunması, stratejik özerkliğin sağlanması ve sürdürülebilir kalkınmanın devamlılığı açısından kritik bir unsurdur. Enerji kaynaklarının tedarikinde dışa bağımlılık, ülkeleri küresel piyasalardaki dalgalanmalara, fiyat oynaklıklarına ve jeopolitik gerilimlere karşı savunmasız bırakırken, aynı zamanda dış politika ve ulusal güvenlik stratejilerini de doğrudan etkilemektedir. Baltık Devletleri bu konuda önemli bir örnek sunmaktadır.

Baltık Devletleri 1991'de Sovyetler Birliği'nden bağımsızlıklarını kazandıktan sonra, Sovyet dönemi politikalarına dayanan derinlemesine birbirine bağlı bir enerji altyapısı devralmışlardır. Sovyet döneminde, Baltık bölgesindeki enerji altyapısı, Rusya'dan gelen kaynaklara dayanan merkezî olarak kontrol edilen bir sistemin parçası olarak işlev görecektir. Bu sistem, alternatif altyapı eksikliği ve ekonomik kısıtlamaların anında çeşitlendirmeyi engellemesi nedeniyle bağımsızlıktan sonra da devam etmiş; Baltık Devletlerini Rus enerji kaynaklarına, özellikle doğalgaza bağımlı bırakmıştır. Tedarik manipülasyonu ve fiyat oynaklığı gibi jeopolitik risklere maruz kalan Baltık Devletleri, zayıflıklarını azaltmak için enerji çeşitlendirmesi, bölgesel iş birliği ve AB'nin enerji piyasasıyla entegrasyon arayışına girmiştir. Litvanya'da Klaipėda LNG terminalinin kurulması ve BEMIP'in uygulanması gibi girişimler, Baltık Devletlerinin enerji güvenliği çabalarında önemli roller oynamıştır. Bu projeler, Baltık enerji şebekesini daha geniş Avrupa sistemiyle bütünleştirmeyi, Rus enerjisine olan bağımlılığı azaltmayı ve alternatif tedarikçilere erişimi artırmayı hedeflemiştir.

Enerji güvenliği alanında geliştirdikleri projeleri AB tarafından desteklenen Baltık Devletleri, enerji bağımsızlıklarını güçlendirmek için hem finansal hem de teknik olarak teşvik edilmiştir. AB, mali ve teknik yardım sağlayarak alternatif enerji rotaları ve kaynaklarının geliştirilmesini kolaylaştırmaya ve Baltık enerji sistemlerinin dayanıklılığını artırmaya çalışmıştır. Litvanya ve İsveç'i birbirine bağlayan NordBalt kablosu ve Estonya ile Finlandiya arasındaki Balticconnector boru hattı gibi girişimler, Baltık enerji pazarının daha geniş Avrupa sistemiyle bütünleştirilmesinde önemli kilometre taşları olmuştur. Ancak enerji bağımsızlığının tam olarak gerçekleşmesi, teknik ve finansal engellerin aşılmasının yanı sıra bölgesel iş birliğini engelleyen politik parçalanmanın ele alınmasını gerektirmiştir. Bölge içi iş birliği engellerinin devam etmesi ve Rusya'nın enerji kaynaklarını siyasi amaçlar için kullanmaya devam etmesi nedeniyle enerji bağımsızlığı konusundaki zorluklar devam etmektedir. Rusya, Baltık Devletlerinin enerji çeşitliliğini ve AB ve NATO ile daha yakın entegrasyonunu, stratejik etkisine yönelik tehditler olarak görmekte, bölgedeki etkisini sürdürmek için karşı önlemler almaktadır. Rusya, Baltık enerji piyasalarında belirsizlik yaratmak için fiyat manipülasyonu ve sözleşme anlaşmazlıkları gibi ekonomik ve politik taktikler uygulamaktadır. Bu tür stratejiler, Rus enerji kaynaklarından uzaklaşmanın maliyetini arttırarak AB ve NATO ile daha fazla entegrasyonu caydırmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Batılı devletlerin politikalarına Kuzey Akım boru hatları gibi stratejik altyapı geliştirmeleriyle yanıt veren Rusya, Baltık Devletlerini atlayan transit hatlarla onların geçiş

önemini azaltmaktadır. Ust-Luga yakınlarındaki Baltık LNG tesisi ve Kaliningrad yüzen LNG terminali gibi projelerin inşası, Rusya'nın bölgedeki nüfuzunu sürdürme niyetini göstermektedir. Bu gelişmeler, daha geniş jeopolitik müzakerelerde bir araç olarak enerji güvenliğinin stratejik önemini vurgulamaktadır. Dolayısıyla Rusya'nın enerji stratejisi, Baltık Devletleri'nin enerji bağımsızlığı için önemli bir engel olmaya devam etmektedir. Baltık Devletleri, yenilenebilir enerji teknolojilerini benimseyerek ve küresel enerji piyasalarıyla bağlantılarını genişleterek dayanıklılık gösterse de Rusya; fiyat manipülasyonu, tedarik kesintileri ve stratejik altyapı yatırımları gibi önlemlerle bölgedeki nüfuzunu sürdürmektedir. Önemli ilerlemelere rağmen, Baltık Devletleri çeşitli zorluklarla karşılaşmaya devam etmektedir. Sovyet dönemi altyapısının mirası devam etmekte ve bölgesel iş birliği farklı ulusal öncelikler ve siyasi anlaşmazlıklar tarafından engellenmektedir. Örneğin, Litvanya'nın Klaipėda LNG terminali bölgenin enerji güvenliğini artırmış ancak aynı zamanda Letonya ve Estonya ile paylaşılan altyapı projelerinde tutarlı iş birliğinin eksikliğini de vurgulamıştır. Bu gibi bölünmeler zaman zaman ilerlemeleri yavaşlatmakta ve Rus enerji hakimiyetiyle başa çıkmada birleşik bir cephe sunma çabalarını karmaşıklaştırmaktadır.

Sonuç olarak, Baltık Devletleri ile Rusya arasındaki enerji ilişkisi, tarihi bağımlılık ile stratejik bağımsızlık arasındaki daha geniş bir mücadeleyi yansıtmaktadır. Enerji güvenliğine geçiş, gelişmiş çeşitlilik ve Avrupa entegrasyonu da dahil olmak üzere önemli başarılarla işaretlenmiştir. Ancak, özellikle bölgesel iş birliğini teşvik etme ve Rusya'nın etkisini dengeleme konusunda zorluklar devam etmektedir. Baltık Devletlerinin deneyimleri, benzer bağımlılıkları yöneten diğer uluslar için değerli dersler sunmakta, iş birliğinin, dayanıklı altyapıya yatırım yapmanın ve daha geniş enerji ağlarıyla stratejik uyumun önemini vurgulamaktadır.

Bu çalışma, Baltık ülkelerinin Rusya'ya olan tarihi bağımlılıkları nedeniyle karşı karşıya kaldıkları devam eden enerji güvenliği zorluklarını ele almakta ve enerji bağımsızlığına ulaşma stratejilerini incelemektedir. Baltık Devletlerinin, Rusya karşısındaki tarihsel enerji bağımlılığından kaynaklanan güvenlik risklerine yanıt olarak enerji güvenliğini sağlamak amacıyla hangi stratejik yönelimleri benimsediğini araştırmaktadır. Baltık bölgesinde enerji güvenliğinin jeopolitik önemini vurgulamakta ve uzun vadeli istikrara ulaşmak için sürekli çabalara ihtiyaç duyulduğunun altını çizmektedir. Enerji bağımlılığının ulusal güvenliği ve bölgesel istikrarı nasıl etkilediğini ortaya koymakta ve bir etki aracı olarak enerjinin jeopolitik boyutlarına dikkat çekmektedir. Baltık Devletlerinin jeopolitik baskılar ortasında enerji bağımsızlığına doğru yolculuklarında elde ettikleri başarılarla ve zorluklara dair içgörüler sunmayı amaçlayan çalışma, tarihi bağımlılıklar ve güncel jeopolitik baskılar zemininde enerji manzarasını yeniden tanımlamaya çalışmaktadır. Bu nedenle çalışma, Baltık Devletleri'nin karşı karşıya olduğu ikili zorlukları vurgulamaktadır: Sovyet dayatmalı enerji bağımlılığının mirası ve modern bir jeopolitik bağlamda çeşitlendirme ihtiyacı. Çalışmada hem Rusya'dan bağımsızlaşmayı hem de Avrupa enerji piyasalarına daha güçlü bir şekilde entegre olmayı hedefleyen Baltık Devletlerinin enerji altyapısını çeşitlendirme çabaları analiz edilmektedir. Çalışma Baltık Devletleri için uzun vadeli enerji güvenliğini sağlamak için sürdürülebilir bölgesel iş birliğinin ve dayanıklı altyapıya yatırım yapmanın önemini vurgulayarak sona ermektedir. Baltık Devletleri ile Rusya Federasyonu arasındaki karmaşık enerji ilişkilerini, enerji güvenliğine odaklanarak inceleyen araştırmada hükümet raporlarından, politika analizlerinden ve akademik literatürden elde edilen verileri içeren nitel bir metodoloji benimsenmektedir. Enerji güvenliği genellikle büyük aktörler üzerinden incelenirken, bu çalışma küçük devletlerin enerji güvenliği stratejilerine odaklanarak literatüre katkı sağlamaktadır. Enerji güvenliği literatürünü bölgesel bir örnekle derinleştiren çalışma, Baltık-Rusya enerji ilişkisini çağdaş jeopolitik söylem içinde bağlamlandırmaktadır. Çalışma enerjinin yalnızca bir ekonomik

kaynak olarak değil, aynı zamanda uluslararası pazarlarda bir güç unsuru ve jeopolitik bir araç olarak nasıl kullanıldığını göstermesi açısından önemli analizler sunmaktadır.

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