

Alan Zebek

GGHS

UMass Boston

My research aims to enhance a broader understanding of global (energy) governance and uncover roles played by various stakeholders in international cooperation and politics surrounding international regime complexity. I am looking into the world's largest regional security organization, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and its energy security mandate, which the organization founded back in the 1970's received only in 2003. Prior to the mandate, the OSCE had been criticized for the lack of cohesion due to tensions among its 57 member-states with asymmetric interests, bureaucratic constraints that limited its effectiveness, and was otherwise perceived increasingly irrelevant. In circumstances when many OSCE undertakings were often hindered, such an event seemed unlikely. Stranger still, the mandate has since been updated several times. The story behind the creation of the OSCE's energy security mandate and how it has been sustained (updated) will provide insights into the stakeholders' motives and efforts in bringing to fruition issue-areas that were initially opposed or ignored.

Considering that the member-states have reaffirmed their commitment to the OSCE's energy security mandate several times, it is reasonable to ask why the mandate has been updated (in 2006, 2007, 2009, and 2013). To explore this, the research has to assess the impact the OSCE has had on energy security by detecting (addressing sub-questions as

to) what aspects/goals of the mandate have been accomplished and, consequently what has not been achieved, and why.

In that regard, as some key objectives of my inquiry include a close examination of the measures enacted by the OSCE and its impact on tackling energy insecurity in practice, its findings will yield real-world implications.

The research is envisioned as a narrative of recurring socialization/interaction dynamics among the OSCE member-states. Descriptive research design seems to be the best fit for undertaking the proposed study as it aims to systematically describe a phenomenon, situation, or population, and helps answer the “what,” “where, and “how” questions (rather than the “why”).

Three major methods to collect data for descriptive research are observation, survey, and case study. The first two typically rely on large sample sizes and offer feasible means of obtaining the data. They are also more effective in describing systematically a phenomenon, situation, (or population) and in generalization, that is, the ultimate goal of descriptive research. As for case study, it is defined as comprehensive account of a real-world situation that helps to discover the nature of the phenomenon of interest.

In their turn, single case study methods provide detailed description of specific and rare cases and better understanding of unusual conditions that occur too infrequently to study with large N. Given the unique features of the OSCE, a single case study approach is in effect the most suitable method for evaluating the role of the OSCE in the field of energy security.

At the same time, no “raw” description of the facts exists, so there are always numerous possible accurate descriptions of a given phenomenon, and the challenge is to decide which is the most apt.¹

Further, although single case study involves gathering detailed data on a narrowly defined subject, it remains subject to criticism because of a relative absence of systematic procedures and methodological guidelines. It is highly desirable that the inquiry would allow to place empirical observations within an analytical framework that could explain the dynamics of interactions among the OSCE members and their motivations, ultimately extending the existing knowledge on energy regime complex and shifting modes of governance and power, thus achieving a theoretical significance. True, most case studies imply problem-driven research, and my inquiry is unlikely theory laden. But these findings would be hard to validate theoretically. The conventional wisdom is skeptical about case study methods and when it comes to single case studies, it is even more so. Indeed, in single case studies theory testing is a difficult endeavor that may threaten the validity of the very research design. Also, it will be hard to try and develop some prediction generalization. As per Kant, “theoretical ambition without empirical research may well be vacuous, but empirical research without theoretical ambition will be blind.”²

¹ Weeden notes, because some descriptions are better than others, field research (checking with many people, living through events, listening in discussions) is a way to arrive to a good description. Accordingly, the data collection techniques of choice are document analysis and interviews, which I intend to conduct during my field work in Prague (the OSCE archives) and Wien (the OSCE headquarters).

² See: Shapiro, Ian. Problems, Methods, and Theories in the Study of Politics, or What's Wrong with Political Science and What to Do about It. *Political Theory*, Vol. 30, No. 4, What Is Political Theory? Special Issue: Thirtieth Anniversary (Aug., 2002), pp. 596-619