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**“The fear of Russia and the New Cold War discourse in the Swedish debate  
over energy policies: continuity and changes”**

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## **Abstract:**

Sweden's energy policy is frequently portrayed as a model of sustainability in Europe. Nevertheless, as Kaijser et al. (2012) demonstrated it, the Swedish energy choices aren't only guided by environmental considerations but are also strongly influenced by geopolitical issues. Crimea's annexation and the multiplication of airspace incursions by Russian planes since 2014 have fostered the development of the New Cold War discourse in Swedish political debates. The activities of Sweden's great eastern neighbor became a recurring topic in every political controversy and particularly in the debate over the country's future energy choices. The fear of Russia is a traditional political theme in Sweden. Critics on Russian authoritarianism increased in Sweden after Vladimir Putin reelection in 2009. These reproaches reached a new climax during the 2014 general and European elections which took place in the middle of the Ukrainian crisis. This paper aims at understanding how and why the fear of Russia shapes the debate over the country's energy policy. Based on the methodology of radical geopolitics, our research relies on three field studies done in Stockholm before, during and after the elections. This paper is organized as follows. Firstly, we demonstrate that the concerns over the country's potential dependence on Russian gas imports increased in 2014 partly due to the reorganization of the European pipeline system. Then, we underline that Sweden elaborated its energy policy to minimize the influence of Russia in the Baltic states in two ways. Firstly, it encouraged their integration in the Nord Pool, a common energy market. Secondly, it promotes the construction of new energy export infrastructure. We suggest that these strategies are reinforced by a discourse presenting electricity exports as a tool to develop the Swedish Soft Power in the Baltic region. Finally, we argue that the fear of Russia increased in 2014 because the New Cold War narrative was deliberately used by political parties during the campaign to defend their program.

## Introduction

This paper begins in the flourishing streets of Stockholm in May 2014 during a PhD fieldwork undertaken few days before the European elections. As I was walking to the National Library, I came across a newly hanged electoral poster made by the Liberal party (*Folkpartiet*). The poster, which is reproduced below, was campaigning against the imports of Russian gas while promoting the development of Sweden's nuclear power program. This slogan raised two interrogations. Firstly, as far as I knew it, the country's consumption of natural gas was fairly low. Sweden's energy mix is made up of 35% electricity (generated by hydropower, nuclear power and wind power), 30% oil products, 29% biomass, 4% coal and only 2% natural gas. Secondly, according to statistical sources, Sweden's gas imports are entirely assured by Dong Energy, a Danish company partially owned by the State, which exploits oil and gas fields in the North Sea. Both contractually and statistically, Sweden does not seem to import a single cubic meter of Russian gas. Thus, why would a political party base its campaign on something that does not appear as relevant to its potential electorate?



**Figure 1:** "No to Russian gas ! We need nuclear power plants"  
Stockholm, 2014- © T.Meyer

Crimea's annexation and the multiplication of airspace incursions by Russian planes have fostered the development of the New Cold War discourse in Sweden during the 2014 electoral campaign. Its growing influence on the current discussion on the nation's defense architecture is blatant. The fear of Russia is a traditional political theme in Sweden and enjoys its own Swedish word, "*Rysskräck*". According to Matthew Kott, the "*Rysskräck*" finds its roots in the memories of the raids organized by the Czar's armies during the Great Northern War (1700-1721) (Kott, 2015). Critics on Russian authoritarianism sharply increased in the

country after Vladimir Putin reelection in 2009 (Henriksén, 2014). The activities of Sweden's great eastern neighbor became a recurring topic in the debate over the country's future energy choices.

Three years earlier, the right-wing governmental coalition - called the *Alliansen*<sup>1</sup> – repealed a thirty-year-old moratorium on atomic power, thus allowing the construction of new nuclear reactors in Sweden. While the country's successive governments have voiced their commitment to a 100% renewable future, this reform revitalized the debate over Sweden's energy policies. Previous research has demonstrated that, if Sweden is frequently portrayed as a model of sustainability in Europe, its energy policies are not only guided by environmental considerations but are also strongly influenced by geopolitical issues (Kaijser *et al.*, 2012).

**Relying on these assessments, this paper aims at understanding how the fear of Russia shapes the debate over the country's energy policy ?** Our research relies on three field studies done in Stockholm before, during and after the 2014 elections which resulted in around forty semi-structured interviews. This paper is organized as follows. Firstly, we demonstrate that the concerns over the country's potential dependence on Russian gas imports increased in 2014 partly due to the reorganization of the European pipeline system. Secondly, we underline that Sweden elaborated its energy policy to minimize the influence of Russia in the Baltic states. Finally, we argue that the fear of Russia increased after 2014 because the New Cold War narrative was deliberately used by political parties to defend their program.

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<sup>1</sup> Sweden political scene is made up of eight major parties; Three on the left wing : The Left party (*Vänsterpartiet*), the Green party (*Miljöpartiet*) and the Social-Democratic party (*Socialdemokraterna*) ; Four on the center-right wings gathered in the *Alliansen* coalition : The Center party (*Centerpartiet*), the Liberal party (*Folkpartiet*), the Moderates (*Moderaterna*) and the Christian Democrats (*Kristdemokraterna*) ; One on the far right : the Democrats of Sweden (*Sverigedemokraterna*).

## **Russian gas in Sweden ? How geography shaped the energy dependence narrative in 2014**

It is obvious that the 2014 Ukrainian crisis participated in the reinforcement of the Cold War Discourse in Sweden's energy debate. However, these events alone cannot explain the rising concerns about the Russian gas dependence. Firstly, the dependence narrative is historically constructed in Sweden since the First World War. Secondly, the country's gas consumption is actually more important than the statistics show. Thirdly, the reorganization of the pipeline's geography in northern Europe revitalized the dependence debate in Sweden.

### Energy dependence: a historically constructed rhetoric in Sweden

Sweden has been almost fully energy self-sufficient until the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century thanks to the harvesting of its large forests and waterfalls. However, the rapid penetration of steam engines had sharply increased the coal demand while, despite extensive explorations, no major deposits were found in the country. Sweden thus had to import almost entirely its consumption from England. This dependence issue has been punctually raised in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by politicians and industrialists when miners' strikes in Great Britain disrupted the country's supply. Nevertheless, this question has only been fully politicized by the outbreak of the First World War which entirely disrupted the country's energy supply. Sweden started to diversify its coal imports in the interwar period by signing new contracts with Germany and Poland which respectively constituted 17% and 32% of the supply in 1939. However, the early invasion of Denmark and Norway at the very beginning of the Second World War put Sweden in a situation of complete dependence on energy imports from Hitler's Germany. The Swedish government and industrialists negotiated the continuous supply of coal with Germany in exchange of iron ores essential to the Reich's war economy. According to Arne Kaisjer, the Second World War constitutes Sweden's most traumatic experience of energy Dependence (Kaisjer, 2001).

Oil products had quickly substituted coal after the war. Nonetheless, while Swedish shipyards were constructing the first tankers, no oil fields were found within the country, thus forcing Sweden to import its consumption again. The coal experience led the successive social-democratic governments to institute policies promoting the diversification of sources and supplies. This mainly decreased imports from OPEC's countries, falling from 80% of the supply in 1980 to less than 10% in 2009. In return, this strategy had sharply increased the volume of oil imported from Norway (32% of today's supply) and Russia (36%). In this context, the future depletion of the North Sea deposits had stemmed little political concerns about the risk of dependence on Russian oil in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The issue of Russian gas dependence appeared earlier. In 1981, the anti-nuclear movement led by Sweden's previous prime minister Thorbjörn Fälldin organized a referendum on the future of nuclear energy. During the campaign, technical studies proposed to replace the country's four nuclear power plants by gas-fired power plants (Kåberger, 2007). Partisans of nuclear energy raised the threat of dependence to fuel importations from the Soviet Union. This narrative was thereafter punctually reactivated during the Russo-Ukrainian gas disputes of 2005 and 2006, as well as during the Georgia war of 2008. However, the moratorium on nuclear power signed in 1981 (and repealed in 2011) didn't lead to an increase of gas consumption in Sweden. Few open sources are available on the provenance of Sweden's energy imports. The analysis of existing databases complemented with interviews gives only a partial sketch. In 2014, 48% of the primary energy consumed in Sweden was domestically produced thanks to the heavy use of hydropower and biomass. Russia, Norway and Denmark supplied 10%, 9% and 5% of Sweden's primary energy, respectively. Russia thus only represents a marginal share of the country's energy imports. Despite these figures, the continual presence of the Russian dependence rhetoric in the political debate relies, firstly, on the regional importance of natural gas that national statistics are attenuating.

### Natural gas: nationally insignificant, locally crucial

As stated in the introduction, natural gas constitutes less than 2% of Sweden's energy mix. However, if this source is nationally insignificant, it represents a crucial supply in the country southern regions. No natural gas fields were found in Sweden and the country only produces minute volumes of biogas. Few shale gas deposits were identified in the southern regions, but their exploitation is still politically impossible (Becker and Werner, 2014). The country is supplied with natural gas since the inauguration of the pipeline connecting Sweden with Denmark in 1985. This pipeline, which crosses the Öresund Strait, remains the only link between Sweden and foreign gas fields. Multiple projects have been considered in order to connect Sweden with the Norwegian fields (the *Skanelled* pipeline) or with the German distribution system (the *Baltic gas interconnector*), but all these plans were aborted, mainly for financial reasons (Åberg, 2013). The Swedish government seems to have switched to a strategy promoting the construction of new LNG (Liquefied natural gas) facilities to diversify its supply (Liuhto, 2013)<sup>2</sup>.

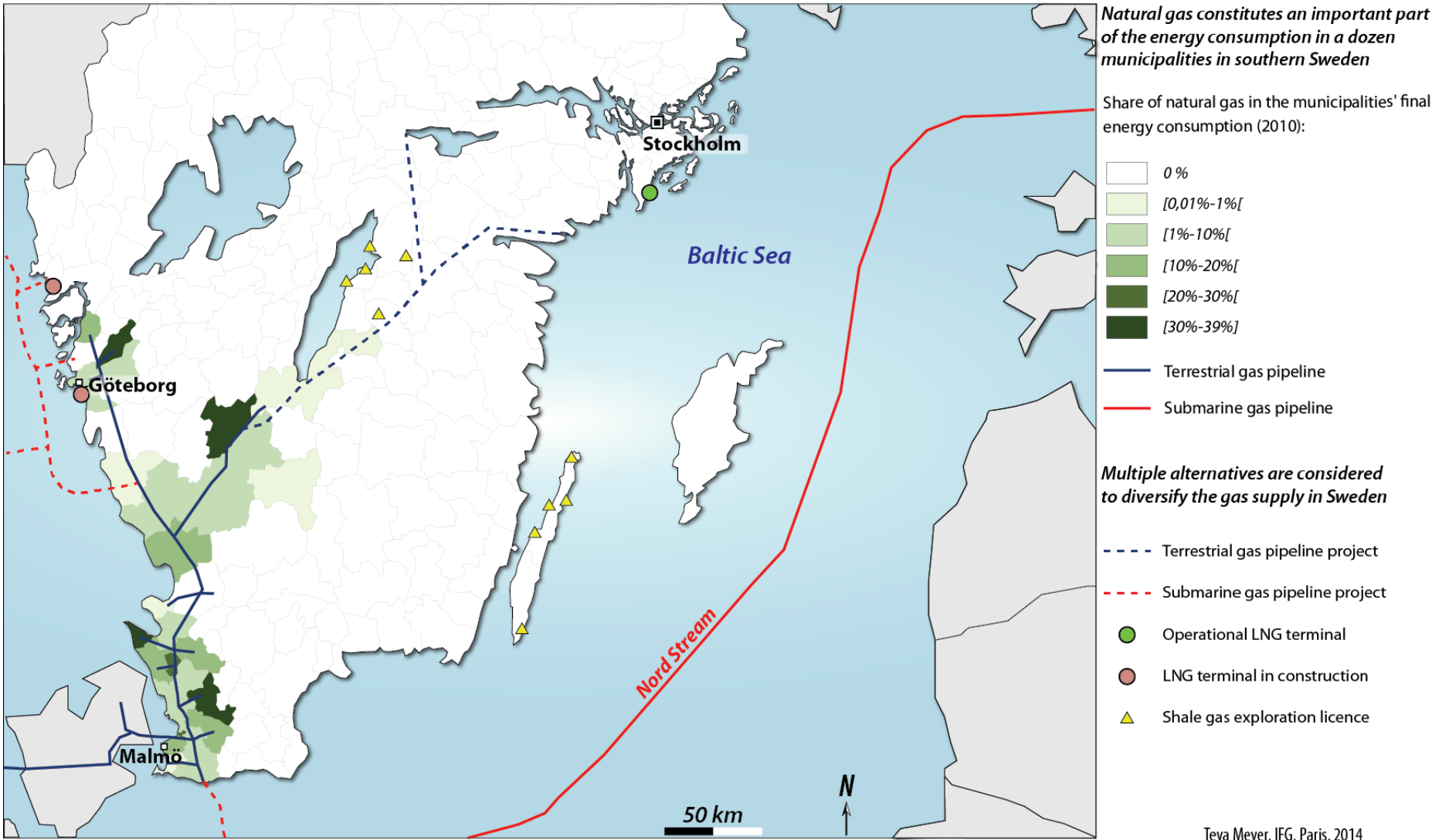
With a single entry point located in the southern tip of the country, Sweden's natural gas transportation system isn't vast. As visible on the following map, only 30 out of the 290 Swedish municipalities are supplied with natural gas thanks to a pipeline which runs alongside the North Sea Shores, as well as a small branch going to the north-east which was opened in 2004. However, these few supplied municipalities are located in one of Sweden's demographic heart, between Malmö and Gothenburg, and gather around 19% of the country's population. Furthermore, as pictured on the following map, natural gas constitutes a crucial share of the energy consumption in some supplied communities where it substitutes electricity. As it fuels one of the economic and demographic centers of the country, natural gas became an important national issue, despite its statistical insignificance.

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<sup>2</sup> The only working Swedish LNG terminal is located in Nynäshamn, 55 km south of Stockholm. Two others are planned on the western shore near Gothenburg while other projects are discussed in Malmö, Helsingborg, Stockholm and Sundsvall.



**Map 1: Natural gas in Sweden, between spatial concentration and future supply issues**



## The reorganization of northern Europe's pipeline geography: triggering the dependence rhetoric

As aforementioned, Sweden is only importing natural gas from a single country, Denmark, and from a single company, Dong Energy. However, the reorganization of northern Europe pipeline geography has triggered a debate about the gas's exact origin. Until 2013, Denmark was connected with the European continental gas distribution network by a single pipeline which was only designed to export gas from Denmark to Germany. Facing the future depletion of the country's hydrocarbon resources, *Energinet* (the Danish Transmission system operator) initiated in 2010 a plan to double the existing pipeline to enable the flow of gas from Germany to Denmark. Opened in 2013, this pipeline broke Sweden's isolation by indirectly connecting the country with the rest of continental Europe, and thus with Russia.

The construction of the Nord Stream pipeline which runs under the Baltic Sea from Russia to Germany has been seen both as an environmental and a security threat in Sweden (Crone, 2007). Its inauguration in 2012 has also fueled the debate over the country's potential dependence to Russia. In an interview to the Swedish newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet*, Energinet's president mentioned the possibility that, in a near future, around 20% of the gas consumed in Sweden might be imported from



**Figure 2:** Infographic made by the Svenska Dagbladet to illustrate the interview of Energinet's president

Russia, through the North Stream and the Danish network<sup>3</sup>. Since 1985, the gas sold to Sweden by Dong Energy is extracted from Tyra Field in the North Sea. However, this deposit is declining since 1994 and might be closed before 2030. To anticipate this situation, Dong Energy signed a supply contracts with Gazprom to buy 1 billion cubic meters of gas per year

<sup>3</sup> BURSEL, J., « Sverige på väg in i ryskt gasberoende », *Svenska Dagbladet*, 05/09/2011.

for twenty years, a volume which was then doubled in 2011. Dong Energy has promoted these contracts as the only way to secure its supplies to its foreign customers, and, first of all, Sweden.

Even if it is technically impossible to measure it precisely, it is likely that part of the gas currently consumed in Sweden, transiting through Germany and sold as a Danish exportation, is in fact produced in Russia. In a context where Scandinavian fossil fuel resources are declining, the complete reorganization of the pipeline geography in northern Europe has strengthened the rhetoric on “Russian energy dependence”, thus facilitating its re-emergence in 2014.

If, as we’ll see later, the country main political parties unanimously advocate reducing the Kremlin’s regional influence, some industrialists (mainly coming from energy-intensive sectors) promote deeper ties with Russia. In 2005, BasEl, a consortium gathering fifteen of Sweden’s largest energy-intensive industries, proposed to finance a new transmission line between Sweden and the Russian nuclear reactors in the Kola Peninsula. BasEl has also argued for the direct connection of the Swedish gas distribution network with the Nord Stream pipeline (Larsson, 2007).

### **Energy as a vector of Swedish soft power against Russian influence in the Baltic area**

If Swedish political parties have considered Russian energy imports as a potential threat within Sweden, this is also true for Russian exports to other states in the Baltic area. Successive governments have continuously considered the safety of this region as being of core importance for the country’s own security. Sweden’s energy policies have thus been conceptualized to decrease the Russian influence in the Baltic area.

## Promoting energy cooperation across the Baltic Sea: security through integration?

While cooperation initiatives are literally proliferating in the Baltic region (Dühr, 2011), energy collaboration had early been put at the top of the agenda. Regional energy integration started in 1965 with the foundation of the *Nordel* association by the Scandinavian Transmission System Operators for electricity (TSO). Their goal was to lay the groundwork for a future common Nordic energy market. The Baltic states only joined this initiative in 1998 after the creation of the Baltic Ring Electricity Co-operation Committee (BALTREL) whose role was to help build energy transport infrastructure to connect the Baltic states. The same year, energy ministers from the Council of the Baltic Sea States founded the Baltic Sea Region Energy Cooperation Committee (BASREC) which goal was to strengthen the region's energy security and to foster renewable energies.

Swedish governments have continuously promoted Baltic regional integration, regardless of their political affiliation (Marklund, 2005). According to Rikard Bengtsson, this constant commitment is both based on geopolitical and economic arguments (Bengtsson, 2015). On one side, Sweden considers its own safety to be tightly linked with the security of the whole Baltic region. On the other side, the Baltic Sea represents a crucial communication interface for the Swedish economy as 46% of its international trade transit through it. The *Sverigedemokraterna* (Democrats of Sweden), is the only political party elected in the Swedish parliament who is opposed to the deepening of energy cooperation in the Baltic area. The populist movement does not contest regional integration as a whole, but wishes to confine it only to the Nordic space. The 2014 *Sverigedemokraterna*'s political platform thus promoted "the development of the Nordic energy market"<sup>4</sup>. But while the other seven parties consider the Baltic states as a natural part of the Nordic market, the *Sverigedemokraterna* associates the Baltic eastern shore with the rest of the European union.

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<sup>4</sup>SVERIGEDEMOKRATERNA, *Principprogram*  
[http://www.sdarkivet.se/files/program/program\\_2011\\_tryck\\_1.0.pdf](http://www.sdarkivet.se/files/program/program_2011_tryck_1.0.pdf).

As we will see, Sweden's commitment to Baltic energy integration took multiple forms. Nonetheless, the *Nord Pool* electricity market appears as the most accomplished initiative. Created in 1995 by the Swedish and the Norwegian governments, the *Nord Pool* is an electricity stock exchange which gathers energy producers, transporters, traders and large industrial consumers. The market expanded to Finland in 1998, Denmark in 2000, Estonia in 2010, Lithuania in 2012 and Latvia in 2013. As approximately 80% of the electricity consumed in the Nordic region is traded through it, the *Nord Pool* clearly appears as the world's most successful experience of regional energy integration (Darmois *et al.*, 2013). Its creation was both motivated both by geopolitical and economic reasons. Firstly, its goal was to help deregulate and to fluidify the heavily monopolized regional energy markets and to decrease electricity retail prices which were 50% higher in the Baltic states than in Sweden. Secondly, the *Nord Pool* was seen as a vector of Soft Power whose role was to "elaborate and consolidate a form of Nordic regional identity" (Palle, 2013). The stock exchange is presented as the product of values supposedly consubstantial to the Nordic identity: transparency, good governance, peaceful cooperation, sustainability, etc. The Baltic states' integration in the *Nord Pool* was thus seen as a way to promote these values across the region in order to minimize Russian influence.

#### Reframing energy export infrastructures on a geopolitical narrative

Despite the earliness of the interstate cooperation in the Baltic Sea, few energy transport infrastructure was built in the region. For now, there is no gas or oil pipeline connecting the Danish and the Norwegian fields to the eastern shore and the only existing interconnections concern the electricity networks. Two pipelines, the *BalticConnector* between Finland and Estonia, and the *Amber PolLit* between Poland and Lithuania, are under consideration. The first submarine power cable in the Baltic Sea (the *Konti-Skan* which links Sweden to

Denmark) was inaugurated in 1965, followed by the *Fenno-Skan* cable in 1989 between Sweden and Finland, the *Baltic Cable* in 1994 (Germany and Sweden), the *Kontek* in 1995 (Germany and Denmark) and the *SwePol* in 2000 (Sweden and Poland). For obvious historical and geographical reasons, the Baltic states remained electrically isolated from the rest of the European union and were only synchronized with the Russian and the Belarusian networks until the opening of the *Estlink* cable between Estonia and Finland in 2006 and of the *Nord Balt* cable linking Sweden to Lithuania in 2016. The following map summarizes this interconnection.

The Swedish government advocates for the development of these transports infrastructure, mainly through lobbying actions in the European Union. Launched in 2008, the Baltic Energy Market Interconnection Plan (BEMIP), which aims at expanding the energy networks in the region, was signed in December 2009 under the Swedish presidency of the European Union Council. Part of this commitment can be geographically explained. Thanks to its central location in the Baltic region, Sweden acts as an electricity hub in the south/north axis (from Germany and Poland to Finland) and in the west/east axis (from Denmark to the Baltic states). However, Swedish commitment to the Baltic states also finds its roots in the nation's history. Sweden's imperial past in the "Mare Nostrum Balticum" (Mousson-Lestang, 1995) shapes its perception of the Baltic region. As Nathalie Blanc-Noël argues, "the shadow of the Swedish Empire hangs over this country which is still looking for a role worthy of its glorious past" (Blanc-Noël, 2003). Furthermore, Jan Ekecrantz' works demonstrate the persistence of a paternalist and Orientalist discourse in Sweden, picturing the Baltic states as Sweden's underdeveloped backyards (Ekecrantz, 2003). Thus, as stated by Nicolas Escach, "Sweden feels like having an ethical mission to accomplish in its old provinces whose economic development is still lagging behind (Escach, 2014).

**Map 2: Electricity exports as Swedish geopolitical strategies Sweden in the Baltic Sea**



Sources: Statistiska Centralbyrån

**Russian energy influence in the Baltic Sea region is perceived as a threat...**

Teva Meyer, IFG, Paris, 2015

Share of Russian exports in the final energy consumption of States bordering the Baltic Sea in 2013:

- less than 10%
- from 10% to 30%
- from 30% to 50%
- more than 50%

— Major gas pipelines

■ Electricity interconnections between the Russian and the European networks

▲ Operational nuclear reactors using Russian technology

▼ Projected nuclear reactors using Russian technology

**...that Sweden must oppose thanks to its electricity exports.**

--- Submarine power cable

● Electricity interconnections between foreign and Swedish networks

Swedish electricity exports (2013):

- 1000 GWh
- 3000 GWh
- 6000 GWh

In addition to economic arguments, the Swedish governments promoted the expansion of energy networks in the region as a way to substitute Russian imports in the neighboring countries. According to Celine Bayou, “breakdowns of oil and gas supplies have been frequent in the Baltic states, corresponding to periods of tensions with the Kremlin” (Bayou, 2007). Besides hydrocarbons, the Russian government is also using electricity, and particularly nuclear power, as a coercive policy in the region (Oxenstierna, 2012). Overall, *Rosatom*, the Russian atomic technology consortium, is planning to build seven nuclear reactors in the region (six in Russia, of which two in the Kaliningrad enclave, and one in Finland), with the objectives of increasing its electricity export capacity to the Baltic republics.

Situations differ from state to state. Estonia produces 70% of its primary energy consumption thanks to the exploitation of Kukersite oil shale deposit. Coal mines in Poland and Germany respectively constitute 55% and 25 % of the nation’s energy mix while renewable sources give 36% energy self-sufficiency to Latvia, 40% to Finland and 52% to Sweden. Lithuania appears, by far, as the most energy-dependent country in the Baltic region. Deprived of large hydrocarbons deposits and with limited renewable capacities, Lithuania imports 80% of its energy. These differences are blatant in the electricity sector. While Latvia produces 70% of its power consumption thanks to its numerous dams, Lithuania is compelled to import two thirds of its needs since the closure of Ignalina nuclear plant in 2009 which was requested by the European union before its adhesion. Despite ongoing diversification strategies (which focus mainly on the construction of LNG terminals), Latvia and Lithuania are still heavily relying on Russian energy imports, which provide respectively 73% and 61% of their consumption (Mišík and Prachárová, 2016).

While Sweden does not produce oil or gas, electricity is presented as the only available energy sources to decrease Russian influence in the Baltic states. Electricity exports are



promoted as “tools to reinforce the Swedish security policy in the Baltic Sea area”<sup>5</sup> by all major political parties. The reframing of the discourse surrounding the construction of the *Nordbalt* submarine cable epitomizes this geopolitical strategy. Launched in 2004, the project was initially planned to connect a future offshore wind park constructed in the Baltic Sea with Sweden and Lithuania where Kruonis pumped-storage plant would have been used to store the production. The *NordBalt* was seen as a central piece for the development of sustainable energies in the region as well as the spine of future offshore projects in the Baltic Sea. Nevertheless, this environmental stance was given up in 2013. *Svenska Kraftnät*, the Swedish transmission system operator (TSO), refused to link up the *Södra Midsjöbanken* wind farm’s project to the *NordBalt*. The TSO considered that this connection would risk reducing the cable’s transmission capacity dangerously, thus compromising the supply of the Baltic states. This decision was confirmed by the Swedish government, despite protests emitted by the private sector and by the Swedish energy market inspectorate. The evolution of the discourse about the *NordBalt* can be traced. The Memorandum of understanding signed between the Lithuanian and the Swedish transmission system operators in 2009 mentioned the development of renewable energies. However, this goal was absent in the contract signed in December 2010 between the two TSOs and the companies responsible for the cable construction. These changes can potentially be linked to evolution in Sweden’s political scene. The 2010 general elections led to the reelection of the ruling center-right coalition while strongly reinforcing the *Folkpartiet* who promotes stricter international policies towards Russia (Henriksén, 2014). The geopolitical goal of the *NordBalt* had been understood by Russia who repeatedly tried to slow down the cable construction by sending military ships in the international water to hinder the operations in 2015.

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<sup>5</sup>ERIKSSON, ‘*Nordbalt är en säkerhetspolitisk seger*’, *Dagens Industri* [Online], <http://www.di.se/artiklar/2015/12/9/debatt-nordbalt-ar-en-sakerhetspolitisk-seger>

It is hard to assess the success of Sweden's strategy concerning Lithuania's energy dependence. Since its inauguration in early 2016, the *NordBalt* cable transferred about 3 200 MW of electricity, which represents approximately a third of the country yearly power consumption. However, the volume of electricity traded through the *NordBalt* fluctuates from time to time. In November 2016, Sweden imported more electricity from Lithuania than it exported to it. Two elements can be held responsible. Firstly, the *NordBalt* experienced forty days of technical disruptions. Secondly, Southern Sweden's electricity consumption exceeds its production capacities. In period of high power demands, mainly during winter when the availability of Nordic hydropower reservoirs is low, Sweden's exports are constrained. As we will discuss later on, the efficiency of the Swedish geopolitical strategy might be limited by its future choices concerning energy production.

#### Local democracy: a limit to Sweden's Russian geopolitical strategy ?

Sweden is a unitary state where local authorities enjoy large constitutional powers. Amongst them, municipalities are legally allowed to veto any construction planned on their territory. Overriding these decisions is almost impossible for the government, except in few cases such as projects concerning nuclear wastes. Before its construction, the *NordBalt* was threatened by a growing opposition coming from groups of environmentalists and inhabitants of Nybro Municipality, where the cable reaches land.

The ongoing debate over the Nord Stream 2 project, which aims at doubling the existing pipeline, symbolizes the limits imposed by local democracy to energy geopolitics in Sweden. According to the plans, Nord Stream 2 would pass through the exclusive economic zones (EEZ) of Finland and Sweden, and the EEZ and territorial waters of Denmark. Backed by the

USA, the Swedish government took a skeptical position on the project<sup>6</sup>. However, Sweden, on the basis of the Law of the Sea, has no capacity to block the construction of the pipeline in their EEZ, where the freedom to lay pipelines exists. The country's only power is to delay it by using environmental regulations. Furthermore, Sweden's commitment to international law limits any actions that would infringe it.

Swedish political parties hopped to block the Nord Stream 2 by using other scales of intervention. Firstly, Sweden tries to stop the project through the European union by denouncing the non-compliance of the Nord Stream 2 with UE regulations. Secondly, the Swedish governments have voiced its concerns about the use of two Swedish ports – Karlshamn in the south of Sweden and Slite in Gotland Island - by Gazprom to store pipes during the construction. Situated in two strategic locations (Karlshamn is only 40 kilometers away from Swedish navy main base), Swedish politicians, military and experts warned that Russia could use both ports for sabotage activities. Nonetheless, if Gotland Municipality refused to lease its ports to Gazprom in December 2016, Karlshamn city council accepted the contract early this year, mainly attracted by the promises of new employment and investments in port infrastructure. Overriding this decision would have been almost constitutionally unworkable for the State, as the only opportunity was to expropriate the municipality's lands.

### Electricity exports and Swedish Soft Power in the Baltic Sea area

Since the organization of the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, Sweden have systematically promoted its global leadership in environmental protection. While the Kyoto Protocol allowed Sweden to slightly raise its greenhouse gases emissions, the country lowered them by 14% between 1994 and 2012. The Swedish climate

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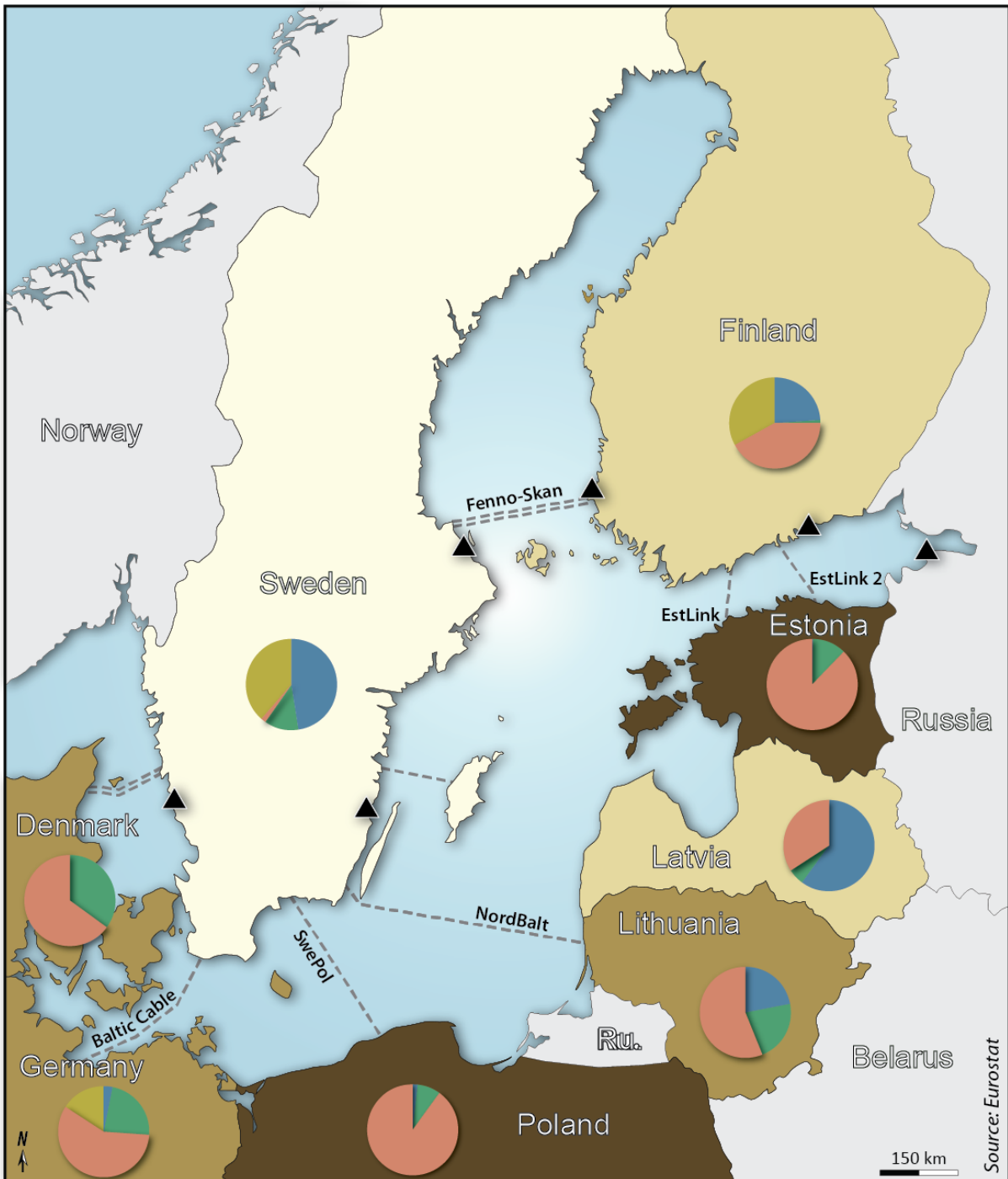
<sup>6</sup>GOTKOWSKA, J., (2016), « The Nordic countries on Nord Stream 2: between scepticism and neutrality », *OSW*, [Online] <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2016-10-12/nordic-countries-nord-stream-2-between-scepticism-and>

activism had been portrayed as a “theoretical anomaly” by political scientists, since the country is not directly endangered by climate change. Research has underlined that this engagement was motivated by prospects of economic opportunities for the national industries thanks to the exports of green technologies (Matti, 2009). Mathias Zannakis argues that this environmental activism reflects the rise of internationalism and of climate justice as a central part of the Nation’s narrative in Sweden (Zannakis, 2009).

More pragmatically, environmentalism became a central part of the country’s Soft Power strategy. Sweden is a small country whose conventional sources of power are narrow, thus forcing it to rely on other forms of influences (Marshall, 2007). The country ranks at the sixth place in *Portland Communication’s Nation Brand Index*. Sweden relies on numerous Soft Power’s vectors. Besides the broadcasting of popular culture through books success and renown brands present abroad, Swedish Soft Power is built on the image of modernity and relies on the systematic use of international institutions in order to exports its norms (Villanueva, 2007). Environmentalism matches with these vectors.

The Baltic sea area became a projection space for the Swedish soft power strategy which aim is not only to strengthen the country’s image but also to promote its political model against Russian influence. As visible on the following map, the electricity mix of the region’s countries are heavily carbonized, with the exception of Finland and Latvia. Greenhouse gases emissions caused by energy consumption exceed 6500 tons of CO<sup>2</sup> per TOE in Estonia and 5000 tons in Poland while it only reaches 1200 tons in Sweden. Fossil fuels represent 87% and 85% of the electricity generated respectively in Estonia and Poland. Swedish governments support electricity exports as a way to cut their neighbors emissions and to promote a “Swedish model” of energy production. This policy clearly transcends traditional political cleavages.

**Map 3: Electricity exports and the Swedish green Soft Power in the Baltic region**



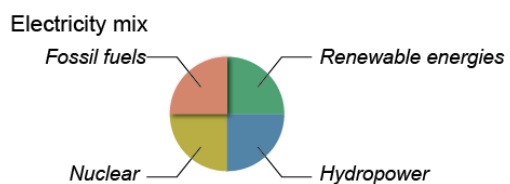
**While the energy mix of the nine Baltic coastal countries emit large amounts of greenhouse gases...**

Greenhouse gases emissions caused by energy consumption (in kilotons of CO<sup>2</sup> per TOE):



**...Swedish nuclear power is promoted as a way to export decarbonized energy.**

- Submarine power cable
- ▲ Operational nuclear power station



Réalisation: Teva Meyer, IFG, Paris, 2016

Source: Eurostat

## **Confronting Russia: one objective, multiple energy policies ?**

Sweden political parties unanimously condemn Russian energy imports as a threat both within and outside the country. For historical reasons, unlike other populist movements in Europe, the Democrats of Sweden positions towards Russia is almost as strict as the other Swedish formations<sup>7</sup>. However, if the parties agree on the objectives, they actually promote different energy policies to reach it, thus endangering Sweden's geopolitical strategy in the Baltic. Therefore, the reactivation of the New Cold War discourse after 2014 appears as a consequence of the growing debate over the country's energy future.

### The "New Cold War" narrative: strategic mobilization

The ongoing reformulation of Sweden's geopolitical energy strategy takes place in a difficult political context. Firstly, the 2014 general elections have replaced the energy policies at the center of the debates. As mentioned earlier, in 2011, the right-wing coalition has repealed the thirty-year-old moratorium on nuclear energy which was forbidding any new construction of atomic power plants. Few months after this decision, Vattenfall, a state-owned utility, announced its plan to build new reactors to replace ageing ones. Secondly, the elections ended in a complex power balance which led to a short governmental crisis (Aylott and Bolin, 2015). Both the right-wing coalition (*The Alliansen*) and the green-social democratic alliance did not win a majority at the parliament. Any governmental coalition between the *Alliansen* and the radical right party (*Sverigedemokraterna*) had been ruled out before the election and the social-democratic party had also dismissed to enter in a coalition with the Left party. In total, the *Alliansen* won three more seats at the parliament than the Greens and the social-democrats together. However, a minority government led by the *Alliansen* would have been impeached by the Left party. On the other side, a minority government formed by the Greens

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<sup>7</sup> As an exemple, in 2016, the *Sveridemokraterna* backed the left-wing government's proposition to deepen military ties with Finland.

and the Social-democratic party could fall if the *Sverigedemokraterna* voted against it with the *Alliansen*. This eventually happened in December 2015, thus forcing the government to call for a snap election. To prevent it, the four parties of the *Alliansen* and the three left-wing parties agreed to sign a non-aggression deal called the *Decemberöverenskommelsen*. The *Alliansen* pledged not to dismiss the government until the 2018 elections in exchange of the foundation of trans-partisan committees to elaborate a common policy in three sectors: defense, pensions and energy.

This unstable context bolstered the reengagement of political parties in the energy debate.

However, the salience of the New Cold War narrative in 2014 is mainly due to its strategic remobilization by the *Folkpartiet*. As the picture displayed in this paper's introduction (as well as the one here) symbolizes it, the Liberal party focused its 2014 campaign on the Russian dependence narrative. This rhetoric was doubly useful. On the one hand, it helps promote the *Folkpartiet*'s pro-



**Figure 3:** "No to Russian gas ! We need nuclear power plants" Infographics from the Liberal Party website, 2014



**Figure 4:** "Nuclear power. For the sake of Climate"- Stockholm, 2010

nuclear stance. Due to their energy policy, the Liberals have been nicknamed "*det kärnkraftsvänliga partiet*" (the pro-nuclear party). The *Folkpartiet* argues for a complete deregulation of Sweden's atomic policy to stimulate the construction of new power plants. While the Liberals had previously focused their pro-nuclear campaign on the climate issue, they shifted it to the "New Cold War" narrative in 2014. In the party's rhetoric, a nuclear phase out would irremediably lead to the construction of gas-fired power plant

fueled by Russia. On the other hand, The Liberal party is Sweden's political organization

most hostile to Russia. Its foreign policy doctrine was hardened after the election of Vladimir Putin in 2000. The *Folkpartiet* argued for the integration of energy policies as part of a complete reconfiguration of the country's defense architecture (NATO membership, remilitarization of Gotland Island, restoration of the military draft, etc.). Opposition to Russia appears as a marker of the party's identity (Henriksén, 2014). While poll numbers were historically low in 2014 for the Liberals, the use of the New Cold War narrative can be interpreted as a strategy to remobilize its traditional electoral base and to singularize itself from the other center-right parties.

Gas isn't the sole energy sources imported from Russia. Nuclear fuel flows are hard to trace as they undergo multiple treatments from the mine to the reactor. However, we identified that between 60% and 40% of the uranium used in Sweden's nuclear power plant was either extracted in Russia or transformed in Russian facilities. As the Green Party's campaign poster reproduced here symbolizes it, these imports were used by anti-nuclear militants during the elections to turn the Liberal Party's argument against him. However, critics were not made in terms of security threats but questioned the ethics of importing uranium from a country portrayed as authoritarian.



*Figure 5: "No to Russian uranium. Close the nuclear power plants" ; Campaign poster made by the Green party's youth union in 2014*

### Supplying electricity to the Baltic states: multiple tactics ?

If every Swedish political party agrees on using electricity exports to reduce Russian influence in the Baltic region, they divide on how to do it. On one side, the Green party sees exports to the Baltic states as a tool to promote renewable energies' development in Sweden. The *NordBalt* is considered as an outlet for occasional surplus of hydropower and for the



electricity potentially overproduced in the future when intermittent renewable energies will dominate the mix. In the meantime, the party argues for helping the Baltic states to increase their share of green energies in order to strengthen their self-sufficiency.

On the other side, both the Liberal and the Moderate parties consider that the supply strategy will only be efficient if exports capacities are constant and rely on a sufficient electricity overproduction. Hydropower in Sweden is highly vulnerable to the fluctuation of yearly precipitation patterns. A third of it is produced by reservoirs, located in the northern regions, which are filled during the spring floods and emptied during winter when rainfalls decrease and energy consumption rises. However, in the event of a dry year, the incapacity to fulfill reservoirs forces Sweden to import electricity and limits its exports. The Liberals and the Moderates thus consider nuclear power as the only source capable of sustaining the production capacities necessary to support the Baltic states.

Lately, the Soft Power strategy started to move lines in the debate over Swedish nuclear energy future. The “New Cold War” discourse spurred controversies in both the social-democratic party and the Left Party over their historical antinuclear positions. The Left Party congress organized in May 2016 debated a motion which stipulates that “nuclear power plant closure must be compared to the possibility of using them to export fossil-free electricity in the Baltic Sea area”. This strategy has also influenced the social-democrats. Ibrahim Baylan, Sweden’s energy minister, stated that “the objective of an electricity mix fully composed of renewable energy does not force us to close the nuclear power plant. The surplus of atomic energy could be exported to reduce greenhouse gases emissions abroad”.

## **Discussion:**

Years of portraying Sweden as a model of good governance have created a cognitive barrier blurring the analysis of the multiple conflicts which constitute its (geo)political system. Divisions remain between political parties about the future of the country's architecture of defense, and particularly on its relations with NATO. However, this article demonstrated that a relative consensus exists on the use of energy cooperation, of transport infrastructure and of electricity exports to confront the Russian influence in the Baltic region.

Russian annexation of Crimea obviously explains the strengthening of the "*Rysskräck*" rhetoric in Sweden's energy debate. Nonetheless, this event alone cannot be held responsible for it. Firstly, this narrative is tightly linked to the concerns over the country energy dependence which emerged after the First World War. Secondly, the rise of the fear of Russia relies on the reorganization of the European pipeline network which connected Sweden with its eastern neighbor for the first time in 2013. Thirdly, the New Cold War discourse was deliberately used in 2014 by the Liberal party whose political future was gloomy.

The "*Rysskräck*" narrative influences Sweden's debate over its future energy policies. Yet, the controversy remains mainly focus on gas (that Sweden still predominantly imports from Denmark) and not on oil and uranium which are both highly imported from Russia. Thus far, New Cold War rhetoric's influence had essentially been visible in the debate over the future of nuclear power in Sweden. As aforementioned, geopolitical strategies in the Baltic might help draw closer the different energy policies of Sweden's parties.

Finally, the Swedish case illustrates the growing relevance of electricity as a geopolitical issue in Europe. The replacement of fossil fuels by renewable sources and nuclear power will lead to the electrification of the continent's energy system. The coercive capacities of

hydrocarbons exporters might be challenged by countries capable of overproducing and storing large volume of electricity such as Norway or Sweden.

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