

8 A gas giant in a small state's clothes (1981–1982)

A political economy analysis of the Dutch margins for manoeuvre during the Urengoy pipeline crisis

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This paper focuses on small states' behaviour during the Cold War in the 1980s from a political economy perspective. It investigates if the Dutch government, being the third largest gas supplier worldwide, chose to search for a margin for manoeuvre in international politics by translating its strong economic potential into geopolitical instruments.¹

The case of the Urengoy pipeline crisis (1981–1982) provides an excellent focus for this analysis.² It concerns the construction of a 4650 km pipeline from the Siberian Yamal Peninsula to West European countries. Mainly the European willingness to contribute to this project gave way to an open transatlantic conflict. On the one hand, the US government criticised essentially the assumed geopolitical risks of Western trade with the USSR. In December 1981, right after the Polish government had introduced martial law to end a period of progressive anti-governmental uprisings, the American president, Ronald Reagan, announced an embargo for the export of American technology. Six months later these restrictions also targeted European-based companies. On the other hand, governments of the larger European states were outraged and openly denounced the, in their perspective, American interference in their national affairs. They voiced a more nuanced opinion on how to deal with the Soviet Union than the Reagan administration, perceiving East–West trade more as a means to keep the door open for international dialogue and to improve the living standards in the Soviet Union. However, the Western governments did not approve of the political situation in Poland either. For instance, in March 1982 the Dutch government openly pleaded for an active investigation of the human rights situation in Poland at the United Nations in Geneva. Subsequently a research group was formed which would deal with this topic.³

This Dutch role as 'political entrepreneur', initiating international mechanisms for the monitoring and improvement of specific human rights issues, has been analysed before by researchers of human right politics.⁴ However, these policies were never connected to the strong economic position of the Netherlands. One can imagine that the Dutch government would search for ways to push forward its ideas on human rights by using its strong international energy position. For instance, it might have considered discouraging the import of Soviet gas by

augmenting the supply of cheap gas to the other European countries in exchange for a change of the American attitude towards the Soviet Union. One other possibility would be that the Dutch government demanded a larger say in the European and transatlantic discussions concerning East–West relations because of its strong gas position.

In the literature on small states' behaviour, these states are not primarily considered to translate a strong economic position into geopolitical ambitions.⁵ For larger states and international organisations, linking the geopolitical to the economic dimension of international energy politics is not an unusual feature. For instance, during the Cold War, the Arabic countries of OPEC embraced the oil weapon in the 1973 oil shock to gain support in the Middle Eastern conflict. Another example is provided by the establishment of the International Energy Agency (IEA) by Western consumer countries a year later. Especially the American geopolitical ambitions were important in the creation of this cooperation.⁶ However, concerning small states' politics, scholars assume that this translation of economic interests into geopolitical leeway would not be the daily practice of these governments. These states are believed to pursue their agendas principally via international organisations or cooperation. 'Bandwagoning' with larger states in defence of their national interests would be their natural strategy.⁷ In relation to this behaviour, academics have made two assumptions that form the basis for the current research: first, governments of small states lack a structural interdepartmental design, which would facilitate quick joint decision-making by the economic and geopolitical departments. Second, as stated earlier, small states are considered to call upon international fora when these states search to influence international politics. Therefore, this chapter aims to explore both the governmental infrastructure and the policies towards the international organisations.

The case of the Urengoy pipeline was discussed at different international fora such as the summits of seven industrialised countries (G7), NATO, European Community (EC) and the IEA. Within G7 and NATO, the transatlantic dispute was clear and sometimes very intense between 1979 and 1982, but it is doubtful whether the Dutch government would have targeted these organisations if it would have searched for geopolitical leeway. First of all, the Netherlands was not (directly) represented at the G7 summits, and the emphasis on the geopolitical implications of the Urengoy pipeline within NATO did not give room to a small state to search for a margin of manoeuvre by emphasising its gas potentials.⁸ This chapter proposes that, in the case of the Urengoy pipeline crisis, the Dutch government could have appealed to two forums to influence international politics, the EC and the IEA. Within the former, the process of developing cooperation on both foreign policy and energy politics did not always go without a hitch. The nine member states (ten member states after 1981) maintained quite different interests in energy policy, as they disposed of different natural energy sources in variable quantities. Moreover, the search for common grounds in foreign policy was challenging with this diversity of principles and interests. The Urengoy pipeline crisis was somewhat exceptional in this context. European heads of state openly attached large importance to European cooperation and the French, British

and German heads of state François Mitterrand, Margaret Thatcher and Helmut Schmidt explicitly referred to a joint European stance in their correspondence with Reagan. One might argue that this strengthening of European unity in the world could possibly have motivated the Dutch government even more to search for a margin for manoeuvre within this European cooperation.

The IEA transcended the European arena and included states such as the US and Canada amongst its members. It was effectively the most important Western international organisation in the field of energy politics. Historically the IEA – and its predecessors the Oil and Energy committees of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) – were the international headquarters for the alignment of Western politics on energy and related international and financial affairs.⁹ If ever the Dutch government had searched for a margin for manoeuvre to influence international politics via its position as gas giant, it certainly would have focused on the IEA.

The main focus of this paper is the question whether the Dutch administration considered to translate its energy position into possible geopolitical leeway in international politics. It is the first academic research on this topic. Did the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Netherlands search for a strategic policy wherein energy matters were linked to the political transatlantic conflict on the Urengoy pipeline (1979–1982)? If so, did the Dutch government search for a margin for manoeuvre in the international arena in an individual way or as a combined effort with larger states, for example through *bandwagoning*?

In the following paragraphs, the developments are treated in a chronological order, with particular attention to three periods: first the orientation phase of Euro–Soviet negotiations, broadly 1979–1980. Thereafter the phase wherein transatlantic tensions were rising (1981). The third period starts with the announcement, in December 1981, of the American embargo on the sale of technology for the construction of the pipelines, which only targeted US based companies. It also concerns the ice-cold transatlantic relations wherein the American government embargoed European companies after 22 June 1982. The research is based on archival research in the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs and Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Orientation phase

It seems paradoxical that, considering the transatlantic crisis of 1982, the project of the trans-Siberian Urengoy pipeline was in its origins an American–Soviet idea born from détente. It concerned the transfer of Soviet gas by pipeline from Urengoy to the Norwegian border at the Barents Sea where the gas would be shipped, in liquified form, to the US. This so-called North-Star project dated from the Nixon–Brezhnev era in the beginning of the 1970s but was abandoned with the return of Cold War tensions and the increasing unwillingness of the American Congress to develop trade with non-market economies, such as the Soviet-Union.¹⁰ Thereafter the project disappeared from the international agendas, until,

in 1978, the project of gas extraction in Urengoy re-emerged in bilateral talks between Soviet and West European governments and companies. It was not the first time that Soviet gas would flow to European consumers, but the scale of potential supply overshadowed any previous projects. In technological terms as well, the enterprise was highly challenging as it aimed for extraction of gas in the hardly accessible regions of Siberia's Yamal Peninsula, something which was never accomplished before. Western credit loans and technology would facilitate the extraction of deep gas reservoirs and the construction of pipelines. This 'win-win situation' for both Western industries and the development of Soviet-European gas trade was soon to be described in Europe as the 'Deal of the century'.¹¹

Gradually after 1978, the Euro-Soviet talks became more and more concrete on the construction of the pipeline and the possible future gas supply. Telegrams from the Dutch embassies in West European countries informed the home country of the developments.¹² An interesting observation of the correspondence from the Dutch embassies is that the telegrams were directly addressed to the Ministry of Economic Affairs with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs only in 'cc'. It was the Directorate General for Foreign Economic Relations, *Buitenlandse Economische Betrekkingen* (BEB), that coordinated the foreign trade within the Dutch ministries on policies stipulated by the Council of Ministers. Part of the Ministry of Economics, the BEB was in a way an inter-ministerial section that aimed to get the different interested departments from the ministries of economics, finance and foreign affairs on the same page. As an exception to the diplomatic rule, the BEB maintained direct communication lines with the *chef de poste* at the different embassies and with the economic section, although it was formally not part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.¹³ The information about the talks on the Urengoy pipeline came directly from these economic attaches and was, not surprisingly, mostly economic in nature. It dealt with quantitative specifications on the potential future gas supply, the status of the possible upcoming agreements, lists of the companies involved and summaries of national energy situations.

In the first phase of the negotiations, however, the Urengoy pipeline was not central in international discussions. Concerns on energy policy were mostly related to the second oil shock, which had taken off in the autumn of 1978. Western consumer countries endeavoured to minimise the explosion of oil prices set off by the Iranian revolution. In May 1979 the world price of oil had risen by 30 percent. In the summer of 1979, the then nine member states of the EC agreed on a common stance on a joint freezing of the import quotas.¹⁴ These agreements within both European Council and G7 in Tokyo were hailed as a large success for European energy cooperation and for a European common position in international economics in general.¹⁵ After these summits, both in June 1979, energy remained high on the agendas of the international organisations. Within the EC and the IEA, talks concentrated on the desirability to relaunch the use of coal as source for electricity, the intensification of nuclear energy and the search for a more rational use of energy.¹⁶ The Urengoy pipeline issue had not yet reached the agendas of the IEA or G7.

The international oil situation and the European targets for a more diversified energy supply certainly created a need for a larger gas supply from the Soviet Union. Vice versa, the Soviet government was looking for new contracts as well. By 1979, it had become clear that the turmoil in Iran had indirectly compromised an important 1975 project for the supply of Iranian gas to countries such as France, Germany and Austria via the transit of the Soviet Union. The commencement of this trilateral Euro–Soviet–Iranian contract would have started in 1981 if the political and societal climate had been more stable in Iran. So, in 1979 the Soviet government was therefore in the same position as European governments looking for alternative energy contracts.

However, despite the energy problems in 1979, the Dutch government did not propose an extension of gas export to its European friends. Quite the contrary, a preparational memo for the European Council of 21–22 June advised the Dutch delegation not to agree to an extension of its production and export when asked by their colleagues. The targets were already set for the next couple of years, it says.¹⁷ A few months later, the Dutch gas exporting authority Gasunie, 50 percent state owned, would even raise the gas prices as an indexation correction relating to the oil prices. At that moment the oil prices had increased by no less than 60 percent and a correction on the gas prices would have sounded logical in economic – but not political – terms.¹⁸

Still, it is debatable whether the Dutch position was intended to be as blunt as these decisions imply. In fact, they perfectly illustrate the Dutch gas policy of the time. Since the first oil shock in 1973, the national energy policy focused on risk minimisation and the safeguarding of gas supplies. The high-quality gas from the enormous on-shore Groningen fields remained strategic reserves for use in times of high consumption or possible crises, while most gas extraction was conducted at the smaller and scattered fields in the North Sea. Moreover, after 1974, gas export to Germany, France, Belgium and Italy was gradually reduced in quantity. Simultaneously, the Dutch government had begun to import gas from Norway.¹⁹

The Dutch gas import policy explains why the Dutch government decided in 1979 to look for possible participation in the Urengoy pipeline project. Both industrial cooperation and possible gas imports were taken into consideration. On the one hand, a group of Dutch enterprises, the Dutch Industrial Group, *Nederlandse industrie groep* (NIG), chaired by Shell Director Wagner, discussed the selling of technological materials for the construction of the pipeline.²⁰ With the consent of the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs, they proposed the supply of turn-key products to the Soviet constructors. The latter declined the offer however, apparently less interested in ready-made delivery than local production at the construction site. The Soviets would go for better known producers primarily in Germany, France and Italy. The lack of success of the NIG caused envy within the ministries of economic and foreign affairs towards their German and Italian colleagues. The writer of the memo complained that ‘the Netherlands has lost out’.²¹ Economic gain, instead of a political widening of the margins for manoeuvre, seems to have been at the centre of Dutch concerns.

On the other hand, the exporting authority Gasunie had instigated a project on possible gas contracts with the Soviet Union with a first orientation meeting in May 1979. An international consortium was created where Gasunie was seated together with its French, German, Belgian and Italian counterparts.²² Within the Netherlands, on 19 March 1980, the first inter-ministerial deliberation took place, and the different perspectives within the Dutch administration became crystal clear: for the Ministry of Economic Affairs, the motivation was threefold. First, it was less related to a need for gas than to conserve a reputation of a credible gas purchaser with its European partners. Second, the Soviet gas supply would suit the European policy for diversity of energy sources in order to minimise security risks. Potential contracts with Algeria and Nigeria had just ‘vanished into air’.²³ Third, the gas contracts would also fit within the IEA and EEC targets for a much desired lower dependency on the oil supply.²⁴

The Ministry of Finances nevertheless maintained serious objections against the purchasing project. It rejected the contracts in respect to the trade balance with the Soviet Union and the principal lack of necessity of any import: ‘we dispose of more than enough gas’.²⁵ Employees at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs agreed with their colleagues at the Ministry of Economic Affairs, although they repeatedly commented on the possibility that ‘the Soviet Union could profit from a dependency for political aims’.²⁶ They pointed to the risks of making the Europeans compete with each other, for example over the setting of gas prices or guarantees for credits. In their opinion, this could weaken European unity, also in other fields such as in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), which was taking place in Madrid at that time. The Urengoy affair did not play a role in this meeting. But due to the overall developments of détente, finding common ground between East and West proved to be difficult during this second follow-up meeting, which had only recently started in November 1980 and would be concluded only three years later. In preparation for the European Council of 2 December 1980, the Council for Economic Affairs therefore advised the Dutch delegation to plead for a European stance in the negotiations with the Soviet Union.²⁷ In this way, safeguarding European unity in international relations seems to have been of a more primary concern than searching for Dutch room for manoeuvre in Cold War politics.

At the same time, however, their remarks on the vast Dutch gas reserves do imply that no real risks in terms of gas *security* were considered as real. Interestingly, the strategic potential of the Groningen gas fields was only discussed in terms of national use. Their potential for international geopolitics were not discussed or hinted at. It appears that the Dutch stance was related to the national strategic policy to preserve the gas reserves. The possibility of linking these reserves to geopolitical leeway had not crossed anybody’s mind.

Dutch gas as fall-back

By January 1981, nearly all member states of the European Community were involved in negotiations with the Soviet Union related with either the construction

of the Urengoy pipeline or future gas contracts or both. In the Netherlands, the gas company Gasunie had officially started negotiations on possible gas supply after the formal green light of the Dutch government on 9 October 1980.²⁸ Following pressure from the Ministry of Finance, where support for these contracts was low, any potential contract should have been a package deal including Dutch export of technologies for the pipeline construction. However, these negotiations did not run smoothly, as we saw earlier and would eventually reach a dead end in April 1982, when both Dutch and Soviet parties could not agree on either technology supply or gas prices.²⁹ So, in the end, the Dutch government or business were not directly involved in any contract concerning the construction of the Urengoy pipeline or gas supply. It would, however, gradually be involved in the project in a more indirect way, via its European partners and the IEA. This would gradually take shape after January 1981.

In the meantime, other European member states were making more progress in their negotiations. For instance, already in spring 1981, German companies had obtained serious perspectives on potential orders and a Soviet purchasing office had been installed in Bonn to facilitate the process. From the beginning of October, European companies signed contracts for pipeline construction. Their number included the German conglomerate Mannesmann, British John Brown, Italian Nuovo Pignone and Creusot-Loire from France.³⁰ In November, the German government concluded an agreement for gas supply for the coming 25 years which would almost double the German dependency on Soviet energy.³¹

These developments were alarming for the American administration where opposition towards East–West trade had hardened in the last few years. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on 24 December 1979 had triggered decisions such as the halting of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) II and exports of American high technology.³² As the then American President Jimmy Carter already said to the American people on 4 January 1980 in the run to the presidential elections: ‘neither the United States nor any other nation which is committed to world peace and stability can continue to do business as usual with the Soviet Union’.³³ Ronald Reagan’s reinforcement of this viewpoint would resonate through the transatlantic talks on the Urengoy project after he entered the presidential office in January 1981.

Until the establishment of martial law in Poland in December 1981 by the Polish First Secretary Wojciech Jaruzelski, the American position was still moderate with Alexander Haig as Secretary of State, despite important counter voices led by the Secretary of Defence Casper Weinberger. Haig’s emphasis on the necessity of a so-called safety net for the reduction of European dependency on Soviet gas, instead of a straight embargo, would still temper a transatlantic conflict.³⁴ The transatlantic diplomacy in 1981 was characterised by a moderate rhetoric where the American administration pressed its allies to use more alternative energy sources and be more cooperative in halting technological exports to the Soviet Union, which could assist Soviet military capability. So, the topic was hinted at during a bilateral discussion with the freshly elected French President Francois Mitterrand on 19 July at Montebello. It was a somewhat awkward meeting

between the republican American president and socialist French president, especially because a new, partly communist government was formed only four weeks before in France. But the French president explained that these contracts were vital for the French economy. Export of technology would give more equilibrium to their very imbalanced trade balance with the Soviet Union. At the same time, as there were problems with Algerian imports, alternative gas sources were more than welcome in France. In multilateral discussions, Reagan showed a comparably moderate position. At the meeting with Western leaders in Ottawa from 19–26 July 1981, Reagan asked his international colleagues to adhere to a more cautious approach to East–West trade. Specifically, he wanted them to exercise prudence in importing Soviet gas and towards the construction of the Urengoy pipeline, but he said he would not oppose it.³⁵

The Dutch sources concerning this period do not mention any consideration of a strategic use of the Dutch gas reserves. However, the potential of the Dutch gas fields became an important French and German counterargument to the American position. On 20 March, Jacques-Alain le Chartier de Sedouy, director on European cooperation within the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, informed a Dutch attaché at the Parisian embassy of a meeting a few days before on the risks of high French dependency on Soviet gas. At that moment, the French were thinking of enlarging the import from the Soviet Union from 13 to 30 percent of the national gas consumption. This heightened risk of economic dependency was one of the main American objections against the gas contracts and was therefore often the topic of transatlantic discussions. Apparently, however, at the French ministry of foreign affairs, visions differed on the degree of resolution within the Dutch government in case the Soviets would cut off the supply. André Giraud, at the time French minister of energy, would have announced that in that case ‘other good friends, such as Norway and The Netherlands would help out’.³⁶ The quote sounded as if Chartier de Sedouy was exploring the Dutch opinion on this topic.

The same argument of a Dutch fallback was given by the German government in November 1981 as formal reply to American objections against the upcoming German–Soviet gas contract. At the IEA, the geopolitical risks of Soviet gas supply contracts were at the centre of discussions. The US delegation, represented by no one less than the Undersecretary for Economic Affairs of State Myer Rashish, expressed its concern for the geopolitical risks of such a gas contract. The American remarks were illustrated by many tables showing the dependence of West European countries on USSR gas.³⁷ Within the report, the German government recalled the geopolitical risks while insisting on the safety net that would already be in place to deal with the potential cut-off of the Soviet gas supply. The first of the four elements of this safety net was, following the report, ‘flexibility of domestic gas production and gas deliveries from NL with stand-by capacities’.³⁸ The existing contract with the Netherlands would allow for flexible delivery in terms of quantity, it said.³⁹

The references made by the German Ministry of Economic Affairs to the Dutch gas reserves are very important. In some way they give an international strategic status to these reserves, something that the Dutch had not done yet. As a matter

of fact, the contracts facilitated this kind of flexible supply (against higher gas prices). It was not only a strategic move for the German government but also a real assurance of gas supply. The IEA meeting was followed by telegrams for the Dutch embassy in Bonn wherein the Germans asked for confirmation of the assured gas supply in case of Soviet gas cut.⁴⁰ Together with the lack of Dutch discussions on this fallback position in the archival sources, this seems to reveal that the German emphasis on Dutch gas was a solo act of the FRG and that no inquiries with the Dutch had been made before the IEA meeting. It also indicates that the Dutch were not willing to confirm this fallback position immediately. One might conclude that, first, the Dutch gas potential came in handy for its European partners and was strategically used by them in transatlantic relations. Second, the Dutch were not *eager* to make use of their position. Maybe this strategic fallback position had not come to their minds until spring 1981, but they were certainly made aware of it by the French in March 1981, as we have seen. It is still surprising why the Dutch delegation did not mention their potential role in gas security at the IEA meeting in November. They could have assumed a more active role in these transatlantic discussions and possibly even in the developments.

A clear opening for political manoeuvre was staring the Dutch right in the face, but they did not take the opportunity. It gives the impression that their position was defined solely by the national policy of strategic gas conservation. In any way, this was the viewpoint of the American government when it considered a possible strategic use of Dutch gas to counter geopolitical dependence on Soviet gas. Several US reports questioned the potentials of Dutch gas supply to prevent gas contracts with the Soviet Union. However, the American analysis did not qualify the Dutch potentials as sufficient. The available Dutch gas was predicted to be exhausted by 1990 and would therefore not last as a long-term solution. By contrast, Norwegian gas was expected to have more potential.⁴¹

Embargo

The international political climate changed substantially in December 1981 when Jaruzelski introduced martial law in Poland. All Americans could learn of Reagan's consternation in his televised Christmas speech of 24 December wherein he urged the American people to light a 'solidarity' candle for the Polish people that evening. Inside the governmental debates on foreign policy towards the Soviet Union, the radical voice of Secretary of Defence Weinberger was gaining ground at the expense of Secretary of State Haig who would resign a few months later. On 29 December, Reagan imposed economic sanctions on the Soviets, including embargos on the execution of pipeline equipment contracts.⁴²

The December 1981 embargo put further strains on transatlantic relations. The restrictions only applied to American companies in the US, but with their imposition the American government had adopted a hard line and it was not certain how this would develop further. At the NATO meeting of early 1982, a consensus was reached on the condemnation of the Polish crisis, but no firm agreement on economic and commercial relations was agreed upon despite fierce debate.⁴³

It is possible that this had its consequences on European–Soviet relations. For instance, in spring 1982 both Belgian gas companies and the government inquired with their Dutch counterparts about the room for possible Dutch gas supply in order to replace the potential contract with Soyugaz in the Soviet Union. In that case, if the Dutch would take over this supply from the Soviets, the Belgians could withdraw from their negotiations with the Soviets. It is unclear, however, to what extent geopolitical motives did play a role in this Belgian decision. This did not concern a major agreement on a structural gas supply; the Soviet contract would only have concerned a *guarantee* of gas supply for the period 1986–1990 in the case of a lower supply from other, mostly Algerian, sources.⁴⁴ So one could reason that this topic should be understood outside the context of the Urengoy affair. Still, it is interesting that this inquiry suddenly popped up right after the embargo of December 1981 and at the time of tense transatlantic discussions within NATO. All involved must have been aware of the geopolitical concerns related to the Soviet gas supply, especially after the notorious embargo announcement of December. It is also significant that the Dutch government approved of the new contract although this countered all national policy lines on gas export. After deliberation by the ministerial council on 7 July, the Dutch Minister of Economics Jan Terlouw did send a letter of approval for supply in times of scarcity to the Belgian Secretary of State on Energy Etienne Knoops. This letter would ease the Belgian concerns and make them stop the negotiations with the Soviets.⁴⁵

The Belgian switch of focus from Soviet to Dutch gas supply seems to indicate that the Urengoy pipeline was mainly an economic affair for the Dutch. That was not entirely the case for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where the head of department on European cooperation blamed the BEB department for having failed to organise inter-ministerial deliberations on the topic while more than only trade related aspects were involved with extra gas supply to Belgium.⁴⁶ Indeed, other documents also show a frustrated Foreign Affairs which would have liked to have had a larger say in the international gas policies of the time. On 4 August, the same head of the department of European affairs reasoned that the absence of direct economic involvement in the Urengoy deal would leave the transatlantic conflict on the Urengoy affair a matter of notably political and legal nature. Therefore, ‘the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should take over the lead from Economic Affairs’.⁴⁷ This wish would not be honoured in the coming month, although deliberations at BEB were intensified in the coming months. A month later, though, the Dutch would overtly aspire for a more active role in the European stance towards the United States by joining the four involved countries in formulating a joint position.⁴⁸ However, delegates of the four large European states (maintaining the gas contracts with the USSR) did not grant their Dutch colleagues a substantial role in the decision-making. Apparently, Dutch input during the meetings on the US sanctions caused frustration on the side of the larger European member states, especially France and the United Kingdom and was therefore largely blocked. Sensationally, the British weekly magazine *City Limits* of 4 October quoted a leaked confidential briefing which had been written by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office in preparation for the upcoming Council of Ministers on

20–21 September. Considering the American export restrictions, which were on the agenda of this Council, the briefing would have stipulated a British position that was ‘to brief colleagues in general terms without taking the lead, to say that participation should be limited to the four countries with large contracts (France, Germany, Italy, US), thus excluding the Dutch’.⁴⁹ When the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Relations asked for clarity on this position, the British foreign office apologised for the leak but did not state a different position than quoted by the magazine.⁵⁰

The overall emphasis on economic aspects of the Urengoy deal seems to have been a general perspective in Europe. A similar emphasis is retraceable in the viewpoints of other European governments. So, the first response of Prime Minister Mauroy in January 1982 was that ‘it would be useless to add to the Polish drama an extra drama for the French of not being supplied in gas’.⁵¹ Indeed, later, during an interview in 1985, Helmut Schmidt would explain about the European viewpoint on the pipeline construction:

Maintaining economic relations with the East is an essential part of European policy. We have been trading with the Russians for hundreds of years; we are all part of an inter-European trade network. The bottom-line is simple: We will not let the United States dictate this aspect of our economic policy.⁵²

In other words, the Europeans were conscious of the geopolitical bias of the Urengoy pipeline but prioritised the economic aspects of the deal.⁵³ This line of reasoning also resonates in an Italian decision to suspend its negotiations on Russian gas in January 1982. Although the American government was eager to proclaim that this showed the Italian consent on renouncing East–West trade, the Italian Prime Minister Giovanni Spadolini was very clear about its solely commercial reasons for the suspension: it preferred to take more time to arrange a better trade deal.⁵⁴

The transatlantic tensions did not cease after the NATO meeting in January. Instead, the quarrels continued on all three aspects of the Urengoy deal. Concerning the credit issue, the Americans succeeded in forging a deal at the OECD wherein the interest rates for the Soviets were raised. But the European–Soviet contracts for both pipeline construction and future gas supply remained important matters of disagreement with a potential embargo hanging over the European heads. Therefore, the agreement reached by the industrialised countries during their summit in Versailles on 4–6 June 1982 was certainly a relief to the European governments. Reagan assured his European colleagues that the US would not block the pipeline construction in exchange for the allies’ willingness to adopt more stringent export credit policies towards the Soviet Union.⁵⁵ But the agreement fell apart almost as soon as the summit ended. On 18 June 1982, President Reagan made his decision to broaden the embargo.⁵⁶ On 22 June 1982, Reagan announced the restrictions on the export to the Soviet Union of products produced with US technical data. He aimed at all exports related to the construction of the Urengoy gas pipeline, including the trade managed by non-American companies. From the European states, the regulations triggered indignant responses about the

American arrogance to try to prevent the fulfilment of contracts outside its jurisdiction. The European position was well articulated by the West German political commentator and publisher Rudolf Augstein in the German monthly *Der Spiegel*, 'The Americans were treating us as if we were not sovereign states. We could not sit still and let them run our lives for us'.⁵⁷

The four involved governments of France, Germany, the United Kingdom and Italy responded furiously to the regulations and quickly pursued legal action in order to constrain the impact of the US regulations upon existing contracts.⁵⁸ Apart from these national measures, the member states of the EC prepared for joint responses to the embargo immediately after the announcement on 22 June. The Council of Ministers and the European Commission each formally denounced the embargo and asked for a withdrawal of the restrictions. Thereafter, they formulated an extensive joint statement, which the presidents of both the European Commission and the Council delivered on 15 August in Washington.⁵⁹

In the Netherlands, the BEB department coordinated the Dutch contribution to this European statement. The Dutch position on this matter was a full denouncement of the embargo out of solidarity with the more concerned member states and because of possible further inconvenience for Dutch companies.⁶⁰ No Dutch company was directly involved in the pipeline construction, but some were indirectly delivering products that were used in the construction. It was in the national economic interest to smoothen the transatlantic conflict with the United States. In this way, the Dutch contributed to the European deliberations by joining the smaller European states in emphasising the need of a compromise and the opening of an opportunity for the Americans to cancel the embargo without losing face. In the end, the Americans would renounce the restrictions in November 1982 after the release of Polish solidarity leader Lech Walesa and the agreement within IEA to reassess East–West trade.

Conclusion

The analysis of the Dutch policy during the Urengoy pipeline crisis has offered insights into the strategic choices of a small country with large economic potential. The deliberations on the Dutch gas policy changed during the period of 1979–1982. Initially, the emphasis was mainly put on the economic aspects of the pipeline deal, but from 1980 gradually the geopolitical aspects of the matter became more important. In 1981, the strategic potential of the Dutch gas reserves was only stressed by foreign governments. But the embargo of 22 June 1982 seems to have acted as a wake-up call for the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs as these American regulations triggered a joint European stance in international politics. After that moment, the Dutch foreign ministry, eager to have a say in the European Community, started to occasionally point at their gas capacities. Indeed, the prospects of a comfortable place at the European decision-making table, amongst the larger member states, triggered from that moment a duality in Dutch policy wherein not only the economic aspects mattered but also the importance of the position of the Netherlands within European cooperation. However,

the Dutch would probably have had more success with their European colleagues if they had started playing this game at an earlier moment, for example during the IEA meeting in November 1981 where the German government rebutted American criticism by playing the Dutch trump card.

The analysis clearly reveals a Dutch commitment to their national energy policy of conserving strategic gas reserves. The margins for geopolitical actions were limited by this essentially economic policy. Energy policy in the Netherlands was about trade, about the national treasury and about business. When oil prices exploded in 1979, the Dutch subsequently raised the price of gas in the export to their neighbours. There was no consideration of an alternative approach, such as enlarging export supply or maintaining the same price, which could have enforced their relationship with their European fellows and possibly enlarged their political leeway in European politics. When in spring 1982 the Belgium government asked for the assurance of Dutch supply, their wish was granted by their Northern neighbours but only with strong provisions. After the embargo of 1982, the Dutch position within the European deliberations at the Council and the Commission followed the logic that only a swift ending of the conflict would be beneficial for the Dutch economy. There was no direct economic involvement in the Urengoy affair, and the conflict could possibly have hindered Dutch export in general. That's why the Dutch supported a swift compromise with their American counterparts without them losing face.

The infrastructure between the three ministries of foreign affairs, economics and finance was not beneficial for a linkage of economic strength with possible geopolitical margins for manoeuvre. Dutch gas policy making was foremost located at the Ministry of Economic Affairs. Aspects of foreign affairs concerning these policies were first treated by the BEB. The location of the BEB within the Ministry of Economics (and not at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where it would move to a few years later) assured an essentially economic approach of the Urengoy pipeline crisis. This caused frustration at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs after Reagan's announcement of the embargo in June 1982. The swift change of approach by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs is remarkable. The moment when the opportunity arose to play a more important role in European decision making, the Ministry swiftly made the linkage between economic strength and geopolitical leeway. But still, one might question if this change of policy was not dominated by essentially economic factors. It was of Dutch economic interest to smoothen the transatlantic relations, and these relations were essentially jeopardised by the larger European states that were directly involved in the Urengoy affair.

The geopolitical relevance of the gas reserves seems difficult to miss. But still, until June 1982, no archival source shows a Dutch consideration of it. Geopolitical risks were only discussed in a passive way, at the level of supply security from Russia. Instead, the potential fallback role of Dutch gas was not discussed by the Dutch either in national inter-ministerial meetings or in the international context. Within the IEA it was not the Dutch government that showed off its strong gas position. Instead, the German and French delegates emphasised the Dutch

potentials as gas supplier (and the openings in the Dutch gas contracts), which would lower the geopolitical risks if the Soviets should stop delivering their gas. During the important November 1981 meeting at the IEA, this provided a strong argument for these delegates in a heated debate with the American counterparts. Interesting is the tone of surprise in the telegrams from the Dutch embassies in Berlin and Paris to the ministries of economic affairs and foreign affairs about these German and French positions in the preparation for the IEA meeting. It is clear that this had not been discussed at all with the Dutch counterparts.

Did the Dutch government choose to search for a margin for manoeuvre in international politics by translating its strong economic potential into geopolitical leverage? Not really. The Dutch government sought to expand its room for manoeuvre in European politics, but this was mainly for strengthening its economic position and not essentially for geopolitical reasons. After all, even though acknowledging a certain strategic position, the Dutch gas giant remained a small state in international relations.

Notes

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- 2 About the Urengoy pipeline, see: Blinken, *Ally vs Ally*; William Cromwell, *The United States and the European Pillar. The Strained Alliance* (London 1992); Ksenia Demidova, 'The Deal of the Century: The Reagan Administration and the Soviet Pipeline', in: Kiran Patel and Kenneth Weisbrode (eds), *European Integration and the Academic Community in the 1980s* (Cambridge 2013) 59–82; Peter Marsh, 'The European Community and East – West Economic Relations', *Journal of Common Market Studies (JCMS)* XXIII:1 (September 1984) 1–13; Axel Lebahn, 'Die "Jamal – Erdgasleitung" UdSSR – Westeuropa im Ost – West – Konflikt', *Aussenpolitik* 34:3 (1983) 256–280.
- 3 38th Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights, Geneva 1982; Monique C. Castermans-Holleman, *Het Nederlands mensenrechtenbeleid in de Verenigde Naties* (The Hague 1992).
- 4 Castermans-Holleman, *Het Nederlands mensenrechtenbeleid*, 241–255. The term 'political entrepreneur' was assigned by Jan Egeland in his 'Focus on Human Rights – Ineffective Big States, Potent Small States', *Journal of Peace Research* 21:3 (1984) 207–213, 210.
- 5 About the academic debate on small states' behaviour in the international arena, see: R.P. Barston (ed.), *The Other Powers. Studies in the Foreign Policies of Small States* (New York 1973); Anders Wivel, 'The Security Challenge of Small EU Member States: Interests, Identity and the Development of the EU as a Security Actor', *JCMS* 43:2 (2005) 393–412; Peter Katzenstein, 'Small States in World Markets. Industrial Policy in Europe', in: Christine Ingebritsen and Iver Neumann (eds), *Small States in International Relations* (Seattle, WA 2006) 193–217; Sasha Baillie 'The Seat of the European Institutions. An Example of Small-State Influence in the EU', in: Gilbert Trausch (ed.), *Small Countries in Europe Their Role and Place in the XXth Century* (Brussels 2005) 465–479; Baldur Thorhallsson, *The Role of Small States in the European Union* (Aldershot 2000); Marloes Beers 'Large and Small States in the European Communities, a Challenge for Historians', in: Michele Affinito, Guia Migani and Christian Wenkel (eds), *The Two Europes* (Brussels 2009) 225–236; A thorough survey of the historiography on small states is given by Iver Neumann and Sieglinde Gstöhl in their Introduction 'Lilliputians in Gullver's world?' in: Ingebritsen and Neumann, *Small States*, 3–36.

- 6 Marloes Beers, 'The Oil Crisis, Lever or Barrier for the Development of a Common European Energy Policy? The Energy Policy of the European Community at the Time of the First Oil Shock' (Doctoral thesis, Université de Cergy-Pontoise. Cergy 8 January 2015).
- 7 Beers, 'Large and Small States', 230–236.
- 8 Walter Lippert, *The Economic Diplomacy of Ostpolitik: Origins of NATO's Energy Dilemma* (Oxford 2011) 137–172.
- 9 Marloes Beers, 'The OECD Oil Committee and the International Search for Reinforced Energy Consumer Cooperation, 1972–1973', in: Elisabetta Bini, Giuliano Garavini and Federico Romero (eds), *Oil Shock: The 1973 Crisis and Its Economic Legacy* (London 2016) 142–171.
- 10 Jackson – Vanik amendment to the trade Act (1975). For US – Soviet economic developments and the political debates: Ian Jackson, 'Economics', in: Saki Dockrill and Geraint Hughes (eds), *Palgrave Advances in Cold War History* (Houndmills 2006) 166–188; About the North Star Project: Blinken, *Ally vs Ally*, 28–30.
- 11 Lebahn, 'Die Jamal – Erdgasleitung', 256–280; Demidova, 'The Deal of the Century', 59–82; Blinken, *Ally vs Ally*, 3.
- 12 It concerns correspondence of the Dutch embassies in London, Paris and Bonn at the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NL-MFA), Code-Archief 1975–1984, 9646–9547 'Duitsland West 1975–1984: Energiebeleid' (Bonn); 7743 'Frankrijk 1975–1984: Sowjet Unie, 1975–1984' (Paris); 9659–9660 'Verenigd Koninkrijk Energiebeleid 1975–1984' (London).
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- 32 Philip J. Funigiello, *American Soviet Trade in the Cold War* (Chapel Hill 1988) 192.
- 33 Funigiello, *American Soviet Trade*, 192.
- 34 Concerning the internal discussion within the American Administration, see Blinken, *Ally vs Ally*.
- 35 B.W. Jentleson, *Pipeline Politics. The Complex Political Economy of East-West Energy Trade* (Ithaca 1986) 183–185.
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- 53 In Germany, Reagan's declaration had reminded of the 1963 embargo, imposed by German government but largely pressed by the USA, on the supply of products to the Soviet Union. While the German economy (especially the company Mannesman) had suffered large losses, the embargo did not deliver the desired results. The orders were fulfilled by other enterprises.
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- 55 Blinken, *Ally vs Ally*, 96–113; Cromwell, *The United States*, 119.
- 56 Blinken, *Ally vs Ally*, 11.
- 57 Blinken, *Ally vs Ally*, 105.
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