

RUSSIA – AFRICA

Research article

CONCEPTUALIZING RUSSIA – AFRICA ENERGY COOPERATION

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SVIRIDOV Vsevolod Yurievich, Deputy Director, Center for African Studies, PhD Candidate, HSE University, Moscow, Russian Federation. ORCID: 0000-0002-0466-9727. E-mail: vsviridov@hse.ru

Abstract. Energy sector is one of the key areas of Russia-Africa cooperation, along with the military, food, and industry. Over the past three decades, Russian companies have accumulated considerable experience in the energy sector in African countries, implementing projects in the exploration and production of natural resources, infrastructure construction, fuel supply, and the promotion of Russian nuclear technologies. However, the rapid shifts in international energy relations, the transformation of regimes, and the growing importance of non-Western institutions require a rethinking and adjustment of the conceptual foundations of this Russia-Africa interaction. The purpose of this article is to conceptualize the energy dimension of the Russia-Africa partnership and to identify the doctrinal and normative conditions in which this cooperation is unfolding. The article analyzes the theoretical and doctrinal framework of the Russia-Africa energy partnership, its institutional structure, and its relationship with the concepts of energy security and sovereignty. Particular attention is given to the role of the concept of self-reliance, traditionally important for political thought in African countries, and its compatibility with the Russian approach to energy cooperation. Not only the potential for cooperation but also the competitive elements in relations between Russia and African energy exporters have been analyzed. A systematic analysis of the texts of strategic and foreign policy documents of the Russian Federation has revealed a certain lack of synchronization between foreign policy and sectoral approaches in the field of Russia's energy cooperation with Africa. The author concludes that the main objectives of bilateral cooperation may lie in the creation of regional energy clusters and cross-border infrastructure, localization of production and training of personnel, as well as in overcoming institutional constraints—primarily the dominance of multinational corporations, lack of state control over export infrastructure, and weaknesses in the regulatory and technological base—may be the main goals of bilateral cooperation.

Keywords: Russia-Africa; energy security; self-reliance; Russia's energy strategy; regionalization

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CONTEXT OF RUSSIA-AFRICA COOPERATION IN THE ENERGY SECTOR

Energy, along with the export of arms and military equipment, food, fertilizers, and machines, is traditionally considered one of the main areas of Russia-Africa cooperation [Korendyasov, Konstantinova 2023: 177]. In the past 30 years, Russian companies accumulated considerable experience working in virtually all aspects of the energy sector in African countries: hydrocarbons and uranium production and exploration; construction of oil and gas pipelines, hydroelectric power plants (HPPs), thermal power plants (TPPs), and nuclear power plants (NPPs); supply of nuclear fuel, oil, oil products, liquefied natural gas (LNG), and coal. Amidst growing attention to Russia-Africa relations in scientific literature and analytical reports [Abramova 2021] and the development of interaction between Russia and African countries, there is a demand for a detailed approach—*inter alia*, for isolated industry-specific areas of cooperation. Moreover, the changes that took place in the energy markets in 2022–2025¹ increase the importance of Africa for the Russian energy companies, not only as a potential sales market and lucrative investment destination but also as a source of raw materials or even mutual investment. The dynamics of many years of cooperation between Russia and Africa in the energy sector need to be comprehended and systematized, in order to build a more effective dialogue better adapted to the new conditions.

In the studies of international relations, energy cooperation traditionally occupies an important place, especially after the 1973 oil embargo². The key issue in the perception of the energy sector in the theory of international relations lies in the researchers' views on its confrontational potential [Borovsky 2015]. Studying the experience of Russia's interaction with African countries provides material for observing, on the one hand, potentially competitive relations (between Russia and African exporting countries) and, on the other hand, the process of the formation of interdependencies (between Russia and importing countries) and of the interweaving of these relations into the overall architecture of Russia-Africa relations. In this time, international economic systems are undergoing a period of significant change caused not only by the evolution of the world order but also by technological development and the transition of humanity from carbon-based to carbon-free energy. The architecture of world energy markets is also evolving: the trade flows are changing their directions and structure, and the role of non-Western institutions is growing, including the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the OPEC+ format, and the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF).

¹ These include sanctions against Russian energy companies, the “price cap” set by Western countries on Russian export products, and the Western energy companies leaving the Russian market.

² The 1973 oil crisis (also known as the “oil embargo”), which began on 17 October. On that day, all Arab member countries of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries, as well as Egypt and Syria, declared that they would not supply oil to countries (UK, Canada, Netherlands, USA, Japan) that supported Israel in its conflict with Syria and Egypt. Over the next year, the price of oil soared from 3 to 12 dollars a barrel. In March 1974, the embargo was lifted.

African countries play an important role in these processes, and Russia's interaction with them will make it possible to jointly develop a more inclusive and favorable framework of international regimes and the world order, which requires an understanding of the position of Russia and Africa in the world energy markets and their common interests.

Finally, the issue of *energy security*, *energy regionalization*, *energy justice*, and *energy sovereignty*, as well as the growing securitization of the energy sector, plays a key role in Africa's development. In Russia, both at the level of political rhetoric³ and public policy⁴ and in the expert and academic literature, the role of the Russian Federation as a player capable of contributing to the energy security of African countries is increasingly discussed. However, most of the above-mentioned terms in relation to Africa have not yet been properly understood either in academic or expert publications.

In this context, it seems timely to start a detailed discussion of these concepts and their correlation with the notion of *self-reliance* developed within African philosophical tradition [Degterev 2024] in the context of Russia-Africa relations. This article serves as one of the first attempts to begin a discussion of what *energy security* could mean for Africa and what role Russia could play in ensuring it. It is also important to note that the author's goal in this article was not to analyze the fate of individual energy projects of Russian companies in Africa and identify opportunities and risks but rather to comprehend the conceptual foundations of Russia-Africa energy cooperation and analyze the framework within which it is developing.

AFRICA'S PLACE IN RUSSIAN STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS ON ENERGY

Africa has traditionally not been a priority in the Russian energy strategy due to the geographical remoteness of African markets, their small (relative to European) capacity and volume, the low degree of trade complementarity, and the lack of awareness of government authorities and Russian business circles about the state of African markets and the opportunities they can provide.

Africa was not mentioned in the main conceptual documents of the energy sector adopted in the 1990s: the Concept of Russia's Energy Policy in New Economic Conditions (1992), the Basic Directions of the Energy Policy of the Russian Federation until 2010 (1995), and the Basic Provisions of the Energy Strategy of Russia until 2010. The Energy Strategy for the Period until 2020, adopted in 2003⁵, which for the first time considers Africa along with other regions as a potential partner, states that "the markets of the Middle East, South America, and **Africa** are of interest primarily as potential

³ Plenary session of the Russia-Africa Economic and Humanitarian Forum. *President of Russia*. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/71814> (accessed: 29.06.2025)

⁴ Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of 31 March 2023 № 229 "On Approval of the Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation." *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*. 31.03.2023. (In Russ.) <https://rg.ru/documents/2023/03/31/prezident-ukaz229-site-dok.html> (accessed: 29.06.2025)

⁵ Order of the Government of the Russian Federation № 1234-r dated 28 August 2003 "On Approval of the Energy Strategy of Russia for the Period up to 2020" (As amended on 15 June 2009). *Electronic fund of legal and normative-technical documents*. 28.08.2003. (In Russ). <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/901872984> (accessed: 29.06.2025)

consumers of the services of Russian energy companies, as well as importers of energy technologies and equipment for the fuel and energy complex.”⁶

In the Energy Strategy for the Period up to 2030⁷, adopted in 2009, despite the increased number of Russia-Africa energy projects [Borovsky 2012, Tomberg 2011], Africa remains without due attention: in the part “Strengthening the Positions of Leading Russian Energy Companies Abroad,” among other measures, it only states, “Development and implementation of action plans <...> to strengthen Russia’s position in regional energy cooperation with countries of the European Union, Asia-Pacific, Middle East, **Africa**, Central and South-East Asia, Latin America, China.”

There was a sharp increase in the number of references to Africa in the Energy Strategy for the Period until 2035, adopted in 2020⁸. However, most of the references to Africa (5 out of 6) are in the sections on coal:

1. “Coal will remain one of the cheapest and most accessible sources of energy in the future, the backbone of energy in developing countries, primarily in Asia-Pacific and **African** states.”

2. “Lower demand for coal in Europe will be offset by increased imports in South and Southeast Asia (where the need for high-quality coal will increase), as well as in the Middle East and **Africa**.”

3. “In the future, prices are expected to rise for high-quality coking coals and coals for pulverized coal technology (pulverized coal injection) in blast furnace production; for the main nomenclature of energy coals, changes in the price environment will be associated with the development of coal generation in the Asia-Pacific region, the Middle East, and Africa.”

4. “Diversification of export flows with increasing the share of presence in new markets of the Asia-Pacific region, the Middle East, and **Africa**.” (In the “Coal Industry” part).

5. “Development of railway and port infrastructure to ensure the supply of coal products to the world market, including expansion of throughput capacity, development, and renewal of the Trans-Siberian Railway and Baikal-Amur Mainline infrastructure, as well as port facilities in line with the projected growth in demand for Russian coal in Asia-Pacific, the Middle East, and **Africa**.”

Outside of coal, Africa is mentioned only once, in the context of oil refining: “Some growth in primary refining is expected in **African** countries, where the construction of refineries may become an alternative to increasing imports of high-quality petroleum products from other regions.” Egypt was mentioned separately among African countries, in the context of the construction of a nuclear power plant there by *Rosatom*.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Order of the Government of the Russian Federation dated 13 November 2009 No. 1715-r “On Approval of the Energy Strategy of Russia for the Period up to 2030.” *Electronic fund of legal and normative-technical documents*. 13.11.2009. (In Russ.). <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/902187046?marker=64U0IK> (accessed: 29.06.2025)

⁸ Order of the Government of the Russian Federation № 1523-r dated 9 June 2020 “On Approval of the Energy Strategy of the Russian Federation for the Period until 2035” (As amended by Order of the Government of the Russian Federation № 3892-r dated 25.12.2023). *Government of the Russian Federation*. 09.06.2020. (In Russ.) <http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&prevDoc=606272126&backlink=1&&nd=102751064> (accessed: 29.06.2025)

In the Energy Strategy of the Russian Federation for the Period until 2050, adopted in April 2025⁹, Africa is mentioned 5 times, including 3 times in the context of coal. In the section “Assessment of the State and Trends in the Development of the Global Energy Sector and the Fuel and Energy Complex of the Russian Federation,” it is noted that “coal exports to **African** countries are growing,” and in the block “Coal Industry,” the second task (after maintaining the existing coal production capacities) is indicated as “the growth of coal exports and reorientation to new markets, primarily to the markets of the Asia-Pacific region, the Middle East, and **Africa**.” As part of the measures required to solve this task, “the expansion of railway transport capacity <...>, as well as port facilities to ensure the supply of coal products to <...> **African countries**,” is suggested.

Africa is mentioned twice in the sections analyzing the prospects for the development of the world’s energy markets. For example, Africa, along with the Asia-Pacific region and South America, is referred to as the “growth regions” of the “global energy consumption level by 2050.” The energy strategy also notes that “at least until 2035, oil demand is expected to grow against the backdrop of increasing motorization in Asia-Pacific, Latin America, and **Africa**.”¹⁰

The analysis of the main strategic document of the energy sector indicates that cooperation in the coal industry is currently identified as the key area of Russia’s energy engagement with African countries. At the same time, such areas as the oil and gas sector (including LNG), nuclear energy, hydropower, and others are reflected to a lesser extent, which creates opportunities for their further elaboration and development in the future.

However, the decision to focus specifically on the coal sector should be more carefully considered, given the stagnation of consumption and the cancellation of many coal-fired TPPs projects (see *Table 1*). At the same time, there are no grounds for forecasts about the growth of consumption of coking coal in Africa, especially since up to 80% of Russian coal exports are energy coals.

Table 1. **Coal consumption and power generation in Africa in 2018–2024**

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Coal consumption (EJ)	4.19	4.43	4.24	4.18	3.97	4.25	4.30
Electricity generation at coal-fired TPPs (TWh)	255.9	255.7	236	243.1	236.4	228.3	244.6
Electricity generation total (TWh)	847.2	863.4	843.9	896.9	892.7	924.3	963.9

Sources: Energy Outlook – webcast archive. *BP*. <https://www.bp.com/en/global/corporate/energy-economics/webcast-and-on-demand.html> (accessed: 29.07.2025); Statistical Review of World Energy. Energy Institute. <https://www.energyinst.org/statistical-review> (accessed: 29.07.2025)

It is also true that the Energy Strategy is focused on the internal tasks of developing the energy sector of the Russian Federation. However, it should be considered that the implementation of these tasks is impossible without taking into account the external context, especially for those spheres that have historically relied on export markets

⁹ Order of the Government of the Russian Federation of 12 April 2025 No. 908-r "On Approval of the Energy Strategy of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2050". *Official Internet portal of legal information*. 12.04.2025. <http://ips.pravo.gov.ru/?docbody=&nd=608534021&rdk=&backlink=1> (accessed: 29.06.2025)

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

(natural gas, oil products, coal, power engineering). Thus, their development should be linked to external economic conditions and meet the dynamics of the global energy markets. Even if the task of increasing the exports is not on the list of priorities, the issue of diversifying sales markets, reducing dependence on individual buyers and intermediaries, establishing its own logistics, sales, and financial infrastructure, and, consequently, more profound target-setting, including for Africa, remains critical for Russian energy exports.

At the same time, energy has traditionally been one of the main items on the negotiating agenda at high-level and summit meetings. For example, in the declaration adopted at the first Russia-Africa Summit in 2019, the parties express their intention to “promote energy security cooperation, including the diversification of energy resources, the use of renewable energy sources and implementation of joint projects in civil nuclear energy. Continue mutually beneficial cooperation in the oil and gas industry.”¹¹

In general, the analysis of the 3 main Russia-Africa bilateral documents—the declarations of the first and second summits¹² and the Russia-Africa Partnership Forum Action Plan 2023–2026¹³—allows us to deduce 6 key areas of energy cooperation:

1. Ensuring energy security of African countries (through diversification and renewable energy sources) and overcoming energy poverty;
2. Cooperation in civil nuclear energy;
3. Cooperation in the oil and gas sector;
4. Development of domestic energy markets;
5. Strengthening supply chains, promoting open, transparent, and competitive markets, protecting critical energy infrastructure;
6. Cooperation in ensuring a just energy transition.

An important feature of the declarations is their bilateral nature, i.e., it is assumed that these priorities are agreed upon with the African partners. Although the declarations and the Action Plan concern ensuring Russia’s foreign policy priorities, they are much more comprehensive and elaborate than the provisions on Africa in the Energy Strategy. It is indicative that in the texts of the declarations there is no mention of coal, which is the focus of the Strategy. There is a certain desynchronization of approaches, as well as a partial lag between the sectoral and the foreign policy vision.

The key role of energy in Russia-Africa cooperation is also emphasized in the Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation¹⁴ adopted in 2023 (in the previous versions of the Concept, the sections on Africa do not include energy, which is rather due to the laconic nature of the wording related to Africa). The first paragraph of the section on Africa states that “the Russian Federation intends to support further the establishment of Africa as a distinctive and influential centre of world development,

¹¹ Declaration of the First Russia-Africa Summit. *Russia – Africa*. 24.10.2019. <https://summitafrica.ru/en/about-summit/declaration/> (accessed: 29.06.2025)

¹² Declaration of the Second Russia-Africa Summit. *President of Russia*. 28.07.2023. <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5972> (accessed: 29.06.2025)

¹³ Russia-Africa Partnership Forum Action Plan 2023–2026. *President of Russia*. 2023. <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5971> (accessed: 29.06.2025)

¹⁴ The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*. 31.03.2023. https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/fundamental_documents/1860586 (accessed: 13.08.2025)

giving priority to: 1) supporting the sovereignty and independence of interested African states, including through security assistance, inter alia food and **energy security**, as well as military and military-technical cooperation.”¹⁵

In addition, Russian approaches to energy cooperation with Africa (formulated by various ministries and agencies) comprise a set of documents of different status. For example, the Strategy for the Development of Russia’s Mineral Resource Base until 2035¹⁶, adopted in 2018, introduces a classification of mineral raw materials according to the quantity and quality of their reserves in Russia, i.e., according to the need to explore new reserves or import certain minerals. The first group—minerals, the reserves whereof in Russia under any economic development scenario will meet the necessary needs until 2035 and beyond—includes **natural gas and coal**¹⁷. The second group includes minerals with production levels insufficiently covered by the existing reserves being developed for the period up to 2035; among others¹⁸, it includes **crude oil**. Finally, the third group—deficit minerals, the domestic consumption of which is largely met by imports and/or stockpiled reserves—includes **uranium**^{19,20}, as well as several other minerals necessary for the energy transition (in particular, lithium).

Thus, based on the above classification, a hierarchy of priorities for the Russian economy is built, according to which only uranium production abroad remains necessary for Russia’s development in terms of energy supply. In the case of crude oil, the possible deficit is planned to be covered by “the development of hard-to-recover oil reserves”²¹ in Russia.

The Road Map for the Development of the Oil and Gas Chemical Complex in the Russian Federation for the period until 2025, adopted in 2019, does not mention Africa but instead specifies the prospects for expanding exports to “the key regions for the Russian Federation—Europe and Asia-Pacific countries.”²²

The most detailed plans for Africa can be found in the Russian Coal Industry Development Programme until 2035²³, adopted in 2020. It, like the Energy Strategy (the

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Order of the Government of the Russian Federation of 22 December 2018, № 2914-r “On Approval of the Strategy for the Development of the Mineral Resource Base of the Russian Federation until 2035.” *Official Internet portal of legal information*. 22.12.2018. (In Russ.). <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001201812280093> (accessed: 29.06.2025)

¹⁷ Also: copper, nickel, tin, tungsten, molybdenum, tantalum, niobium, cobalt, scandium, germanium, platinoids, apatite ores, iron ores, potassium salts, cement raw materials

¹⁸ Also: lead, antimony, gold, silver, diamonds, zinc, high-purity quartz.

¹⁹ Also: manganese, chromium, titanium, bauxite, zirconium, beryllium, lithium, rhenium, rare earths of the yttrium group, fluor spar, bentonites for foundries, feldspar raw materials, kaolin, coarse sheet muscovite, iodine, bromine, optical raw materials.

²⁰ Under this article, uranium is also classified as an energy resource because it is used as nuclear fuel to generate heat and electricity in nuclear power plants, along with traditional fossil sources, coal, oil, and natural gas.

²¹ Order of the Government of the Russian Federation № 2914-r dated 22 December 2018 “On Approval of the Strategy for the Development of the Mineral Resource Base of the Russian Federation until 2035.” *Official Internet portal of legal information*. 22.12.2018. <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001201812280093> (accessed: 29.06.2025)

²² Order of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 348-r of 28 February 2019 “On approval of the action plan (roadmap) for the development of the oil and gas chemical complex in the Russian Federation for the period until 2025”. *Official Internet portal of legal information*. 28.02.2019. <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001201903110043?index=1> (accessed: 29.06.2025)

²³ Order of the Government of the Russian Federation of 13 June 2020 No. 1582-r “On Approval of the Programme for the Development of the Coal Industry of Russia until 2035”. *Official Internet portal of legal*

documents were probably developed at the same time, which explains the significant number of overlaps), notes the urgency of increasing Russian coal exports to Africa and postulates the need to develop port facilities “in accordance with the projected growth in demand for Russian coal in <...> African countries.”²⁴ Finally, it contains forecasts of export growth to Africa (Egypt and Morocco are singled out separately).

Table 2. **Regions of Russian coal consumption by export destinations (million tons)**

Year	2018 (actual)	2020	2025	2030	2035
Russian exports to Africa (optimistic scenario)	3.3	5	9	13	15
Russian exports to Africa (conservative scenario)	3.3	4	6	8	9

Note: italicised years for which the forecast values are given

Source: Russian Coal Industry Development Programme until 2035. Order of the Government of the Russian Federation of 13 June 2020 № 1582-r “On Approval of the Programme for the Development of the Russian Coal Industry until 2035.” *Official Internet portal of legal information*. 13.06.2020. <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202006180009> (accessed: 29.06.2025).

The Long-Term Program for the Development of Liquefied Natural Gas Production in the Russian Federation, adopted in 2021, does not consider Africa as a priority market for Russian gas at all, although there are about 20 liquefied natural gas (LNG) import projects at various stages of development in Africa²⁵, and Russian companies (Gazprom²⁶, Rosneft²⁷) have experience in African LNG markets or are interested in entering them (Novatek²⁸).

The analysis of the sectoral strategies shows that they still retain a certain fragmentation, and the data reflected in them is somewhat limited, which may hamper making comprehensive decisions. In the existing documents, the issues of Russian-African cooperation in the energy sector are still reflected in separate areas that develop independently and are not always interconnected. At the same time, the formation of a unified framework for cooperation could help to increase the coherence and effectiveness of Russian-African cooperation in the energy sector.²⁹

information. 13.06.2020. <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202006180009> (accessed: 29.06.2025)

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ouki M. Africa’s LNG import prospects in an era of high volatility and uncertainties. *Oxford Institute for Energy Studies*. 01.06.2022. <https://www.oxfordenergy.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Insight-118-Africas-LNG-import-prospects-in-an-era-of-high-volatility-and-uncertainties.pdf> (accessed: 29.06.2025)

²⁶ Gazprom received the first cargo from the floating plant in Cameroon. *Interfax*. 21.05.2018. (In Russ.). <https://www.interfax.ru/business/613639> (accessed: 29.06.2025)

²⁷ Rosneft delivered its first ever LNG shipment to Egypt. *Forbes*. 06.05.2016. (In Russ.). <https://forbes.ru/news/319529-rosneft-postavila-svoyu-pervuyu-partiyu-spg-v-egipet> (accessed 29.06.2025)

²⁸ Novatek is ready to supply gas to Morocco. *Vedomosti*. 12.10.2017. (In Russ.). <https://www.vedomosti.ru/business/articles/2017/10/12/737524-novatek-marokko> (accessed 29.06.2025)

²⁹ Declarative documents are complemented by a network of tools for bilateral cooperation. For example, the Joint Intergovernmental Russian-Algerian Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation has a Working Group on cooperation in the field of energy. As of May 2025, 5 meetings of the working group were held, the last in 2018. The same group operates with Angola (1 meeting in 2016) and South Africa (no meetings).

RUSSIA AND AFRICAN COUNTRIES IN THE GLOBAL ENERGY MARKETS: COMPETITORS OR PARTNERS?

The starting point in almost all schools of thought in international relations on energy issues is the question of the confrontational potential of this sphere. While neorealists see energy markets as yet another field for the struggle of nations and determining the “balance of powers” [Moran, Russell 2009], the proponents of the neoliberal approach argue that the formation of interdependencies will allow international relations to develop on a less confrontational basis [Goldthau, Witte 2009].

In the context of Russia-Africa relations, one can hardly speak of the formation of interdependencies, for example, in terms of trade in energy goods. Even in those spheres where cooperation is developing dynamically on the Russia-Africa scale, it is minuscule when compared to competitors. For example, in the supply of oil products, Russia’s market share fluctuates between 3 and 10% depending on the year, which, however, is leveled by the dependence of Russian exports on intermediaries and transshipment in third countries. On the other hand, individual success stories can play the role of a damping factor to a greater or lesser extent. For example, it is obvious that the rather high level of economic cooperation between Russia and Morocco (trade turnover at \$1 billion annually), which is based on Russian coal supplies, contributed significantly to the neutral position that Rabat, having the status of the US Major Non-NATO Ally, took on the crisis in Ukraine³⁰. Another such example in Africa is seen in the project of *Rosatom* to build the El Dabaa Nuclear Power Plant in Egypt, which forms a long-term basis for political and economic cooperation through maintenance contracts, fuel supply, personnel training, and loan repayments.

Russia-Africa relations, both in general and at the bilateral level, have a rather low confrontational potential due to geographical remoteness, similar views on global issues, and the generally neutral policy that most African states adhere to on non-African issues. However, there is a widespread perception in the academic literature that Russia and African countries are competitors in global and regional energy markets [Zoubir 2011]³¹. Such assertions are often generalizations without focusing on specific cases.

The perception of Russia and African countries as doomed to compete in energy markets seems even less relevant when considering the few examples that had some confrontational potential. Not without reason, Russia and Algeria have long been seen as potential competitors in the European gas market. Back in the 1950s, Enrico Mattei, then head of the Italian company Eni, considered the diversification of energy sources through Algeria and the USSR as a pledge of Italy’s energy sovereignty³². At the same time, with the growth of gas supplies from the USSR to Italy in 1978–1983 [Zonova 2011: 329–330], the construction of the Transmed gas pipeline from Algeria to Italy was underway. Later

³⁰ Bodetti A. Russia-Ukraine war: Morocco's economy would risk heavy price for taking sides. *Middle East Eye*. 24.02.2023. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/russia-ukraine-war-morocco-economy-neutrality> (accessed 29.06.2025)

³¹ Katz M.N. Russia and Algeria: Partners or Competitors? *Middle East Policy Council*. 2007. <https://mepc.org/journal/russia-and-algeria-partners-or-competitors> (accessed: 29.06.2025)

³² Onofri S. Enrico Mattei and Aldo Moro: Shaping the Mediterranean Détente in the Cold War. *School of Government, Luiss Guido Carli*. https://www.tesi.luiss.it/25420/1/635762_ONOFRI_SARA.pdf (accessed: 29.06.2025)

Italy became a distribution hub for Algerian gas supplies to other Central European countries (Austria, Slovakia, and others).

Nevertheless, competition in the target markets between the Algerian state monopoly SONATRACH and the Russian Gazprom has not led to an apparent increase in contradictions either politically or economically. On the contrary, in 2006, the companies signed a memorandum of understanding³³, which envisaged cooperation in geological exploration, production, transportation, development of gas transmission and distribution systems, exchange of assets, processing and sale of natural gas and oil in Algeria, Russia, and third countries. Subsequently, a representative office of Gazprom was opened in Algeria³⁴, and SONATRACH and Gazprom International established a joint venture for gas production at the El Assel gas field in Algeria, which is scheduled to be launched in 2028³⁵.

Energy cooperation between Russia and Algeria goes beyond the partnership between two state-owned corporations: interaction has been established within the Gas Exporting Countries Forum and the OPEC+ format³⁶. Deepening and diversification of cooperation in the energy sector is listed as one of the objectives of bilateral relations in the Declaration on Strategic Partnership between the Russian Federation and the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria³⁷, adopted in 2001. In the new version³⁸ of the document fundamental to bilateral relations, adopted in 2023, energy is placed in a separate block, which opens with a paragraph where the parties declare their intention to deepen coordination and cooperation "in international energy organizations and blocks, including the GECF and OPEC+."

Over the years, Russia has shown interest in coordinating actions on energy markets with other African exporters, such as Angola, Libya, and Nigeria. However, due to political, economic, corporate, and other reasons, this did not bring significant results compared to Algeria. This is also due to the lower degree of control of these countries over their own energy sectors and the dominance of foreign investors in these markets.

The issue of actors is of key importance. After all, it is the control over resources and channels of their delivery to the end consumer that allows exporting countries to effectively use the "energy factor" for political purposes. Historically, Africa has been a region where various non-state actors have dominated, shaped the environment, and

³³ Gazprom and Sonatrach signed a Memorandum of Understanding. *Gazprom*. 04.08.2006. (In Russ.). <https://www.gazprom.ru/press/news/2006/august/article55819/> (accessed: 29.06.2025)

³⁴ "Gazprom" opened a representative office in Algeria. *Oil and Capital*. 17.06.2008. (In Russ.). <https://oilcapital.ru/news/2008-06-17/gazprom-otkryl-predstavitelstvo-v-alzhire-950020> (accessed: 29.06.2025)

³⁵ Algeria. *Gazprom International*. 2025. <https://www.gazprom-international.com/operations/algeria/> (In Russ.). (accessed 29.06.2025)

³⁶ Hakim Darbouche. Russian-Algerian cooperation and the 'gas OPEC': What's in the pipeline? *CPES*. 2007. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/5084119.pdf> (accessed: 29.06.2025)

³⁷ Declaration on Strategic Partnership between the Russian Federation and the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria. *Electronic fund of legal and normative-technical documents*. 2001. (In Russ.). <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/901794649> (accessed: 29.05.2025)

³⁸ Declaration on Deepening Strategic Partnership between the Russian Federation and the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria. *President of Russia*. 15.06.2023. <http://special.kremlin.ru/supplement/5954> (accessed: 29.06.2025)

determined the development trajectories of industries, states, and regions³⁹. The energy sector occupies a special position here—the growing role of non-state actors (transnational companies, media, “think tanks”) has long been one of the dominant trends in the global energy sector [Borovsky 2014].

So far, most of the export infrastructure in African countries is still beyond the control of African governments. One of the few exceptions is Algeria, where there is a state monopoly on gas exports⁴⁰, and the state oil and gas company SONATRACH owns and operates most of the export infrastructure and independently determines the geography of sales. In most other African countries, however, the role of the central government in resource extraction, processing, and then export is minimal. This is due to a whole set of factors: financial and technological deficits, which do not allow states to independently engage in energy exploration, production, and export and infrastructure construction; the legacy of the colonial era, which had laid the long-term strategic foundations for the development of the energy sector of individual countries and regions and their export specializations; and the dominant position of a limited number of transnational companies in African energy markets. Thus, in most cases, African countries act only as a source of raw materials, generating revenues for the state, and an important source of foreign exchange.

On this basis, it can be argued that de facto Africa is indirectly represented on the world hydrocarbon markets by a very limited list of transnational corporations and traders: Dutch-British Shell, French TotalEnergies, British BP, Italian Eni, and American Chevron and Exxon Mobil; traders such as Glencore and Trafigura; as well as a number of other companies and smaller corporations that play a key role in certain countries (e.g., French Perenco in Cameroon and Gabon or American Marathon Oil in Equatorial Guinea). A similar situation is observed in other energy-related industries. In this case, it is reasonable to speak not of competition between Russia and African countries in the world energy markets but rather of competition between certain Western corporations relying on the resource base in African countries and Russia.

Applying the terminological apparatus borrowed from the literature on international economic systems (in particular, information and communication technologies) [Maurer 2018] and transferring it to energy markets, it is possible to attempt to construct a hierarchy of global governance in world energy markets. In terms of the *rule-makers* vs *rule-takers* hierarchy, African countries are predominantly among the *rule-takers* [Ramich, Piskunov 2022]. The only component of influence they have so far is mineral reserves, while the main infrastructure and institutions (tanker fleets, terminals, pipelines, exchange platforms, arbitration courts, etc.) are under the control of foreign governments and TNCs, and the rules on world markets are formed virtually without the participation of African countries.

Moreover, even intra-regional projects aimed at building regional energy markets and integration depend on the interests of extra-regional players who control the financing

³⁹ Examples of such a key role of non-state actors include the Dutch East India Company, the diamond mining company De Beers, and a number of others.

⁴⁰ Gas Natural pays Sonatrach \$1.9 bln to end dispute. *Reuters*. 14.06.2011. <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSLDE75D26G/> (accessed 29.06.2025)

and technological support of such initiatives. Russia is rather a *rule-maker*, but at the same time it depends on technologies and initiatives developed without its participation, including deep-water drilling technologies, the concept of “energy transition” in its Western interpretation, the energy policy of the EU, carbon tax, or similar alternative concepts of China, aimed at putting additional pressure on exporters of energy or energy-intensive products.

In this regard, there is room for broader cooperation between Russia and African countries in the energy sector and establishing new forms of cooperation in the energy sector, infrastructure, and financial and technical mechanisms independent of Western decisions. Such cooperation seems even more relevant in the context of the growing share of non-Western countries (primarily Asian) in energy supplies from Africa and Russia. The positive experience of cooperation on the platforms of OPEC+ and GECF can be scaled up through existing or new formats of multi- and bilateral interaction.

Table 3. African member countries of OPEC+, GECF, BRICS+

	OPEC+	GECF	BRICS (including partner countries and/or NDB members)
Algeria	+	+	+
Angola	left in 2023	observer	-
Gabon	+	-	-
Egypt	-	+	+
Libya	+	+	-
Mauritania	-	observer	-
Mozambique	-	observer	-
Nigeria	+	+	+
Republic of the Congo	+	-	-
Eq. Guinea	+	+	-
Senegal	-	observer	-
Sudan	+	-	-
South Sudan	+	-	-

Note: the table includes countries that are members of OPEC/OPEC+/GECF. Additionally, the fact of membership in the BRICS formats is noted for them. +/- means that the country is (not) a full member of the organization.

Source: Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. OPEC. <https://www.opec.org> (accessed: 29.07.2025); Gas Exporting Countries Forum. GECF. <https://www.gecf.org> (accessed: 29.07.2025).

The key issue in considering the prospects for such interaction is the sovereignty of control over the fuel and energy sector, not only and not so much in terms of “physical” control over assets but rather in terms of regulatory, technological, and environmental control, which requires strengthening the role of national regulators, their human capital, and their technological base.

RUSSIA AS ONE OF THE KEY PARTICIPANTS IN THE PROCESS
OF STRENGTHENING ENERGY SECURITY OF AFRICA'S COUNTRIES

In recent years, amidst the development of Russia-Africa relations, their diversification, and the trend towards securitization in increasing number of industries, political discourse has seen the idea of Russia “as a guarantor of Africa’s security and sovereignty,”⁴¹ with the concept of “security” in this case being interpreted broadly to include information, food, energy, biological, and other areas of security. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of Russian policy in Africa and its role in the region, but there is still no in-depth elaboration of such a concept, which would be based on the theoretical apparatus, revealing the content of the terms used. Applied to Russia-Africa relations, researchers primarily focus on physical security issues [Isaev et al. 2023].

Energy security is a multivalent term, the perception of which depends not only on the school of thought but also on the position of the state in the world energy markets. The logic of the formation of the term at the turn of the 1970s and the 1980s against the background of energy crises and embargoes also determined the initial interpretation, which rather refers to importing countries and implies guaranteed stable supplies, not subject to political conjuncture and excessive price fluctuations. For exporting countries, the concept formed based on the logic of importers is more relevant—not the *security of supply* but the *security of demand*, i.e., long-term guarantees of demand for supplies of a particular type of energy [Borovsky 2022].

A related concept is *energy independence*—“striving for energy self-sufficiency of the state at the expense of any available opportunities”—and its logical development, *energy sovereignty*, when “states are able to provide themselves with energy by themselves—by refusing imported fossil fuels and switching to available alternative sources” [Schelly 2020].

It is also reasonable to cite the definition of energy security according to the Energy Security Doctrine of the Russian Federation of 2019: “Energy security is a state of protection of the country's economy and population from threats to national security in the energy sector, which ensures the fulfilment of the requirements for fuel and energy supply to consumers stipulated by the legislation of the Russian Federation, as well as the fulfilment of export contracts and international obligations of the Russian Federation.”⁴² Thus, the doctrine presents a complex interpretation of energy security, from the point of view of both the consumer and the exporter.

The African Union, in its key development document for the continent, Agenda 2063, defines the main task of the region’s countries in the energy sector as harnessing the potential of all of Africa’s energy resources to provide access to modern, reliable,

⁴¹ See: Russia to help African countries strengthen sovereignty, Putin says. *RIA Novosti*. 26.07.2023. (In Russ.). <https://ria.ru/20230726/afrika-1886305199.html> (accessed: 29.06.2025); International Organisation of Pan-Africanists supported Russia’s course in Africa. *TASS*. 10.02.2024. (In Russ.). <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/19954585> (accessed: 29.06.2025); The Sovfed declared Russia’s readiness to act as a guarantor of security in Africa. *Gazeta.RU*. 27.08.2023. (In Russ.). <https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2023/08/27/21157826.shtml> (accessed: 29.06.2025)

⁴² Decree of the President of the Russian Federation № 216 of 13 May 2019 “On Approval of the Doctrine of Energy Security of the Russian Federation.” *Official Internet portal of legal information*. 13.05.2019. (In Russ.). <http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&firstDoc=1&lastDoc=1&nd=102549810> (accessed: 29.06.2025)

affordable, renewable, and environmentally friendly energy for African households, companies, industries, and organizations by creating national and regional energy pools and energy systems⁴³ with reliance on energy resources located in Africa.

The concept of energy sovereignty not on a country but on a regional or, in some aspects, continental level, i.e., the reliance on one's own resources, is consonant with traditional African ideological and philosophical developments: the Tanzanian concept of *ujamaa*, enshrined in the Arusha Declaration of 1967, which postulates the principle of *self-reliance*, and the ideas of Pan-Africanism and Negritude of the prominent African political thinkers and philosophers, Senegalese Sédar Senghor [Isanbor 2023] and Ghanaian Kwame Nkrumah [Haynes 1988]. In this interpretation, self-reliance implies reduced dependence on external economic aid. Although African countries have managed to achieve political sovereignty, the challenge of gaining economic independence remains [Mein 2003]. In fact, the desired model of regionalism, based on the above philosophical constructs, is at odds with the established model of globalization [Mensah 2008], in which African resources are not used for the development of the region but are used outside it. This is illustrated, for example, by the position of African countries in most global value chains⁴⁴.

The concept of self-reliance, which became popular in Africa during the wave of decolonization and the emergence of independent states in the 1960s and 1980s, has become relevant again in the late 2010s and early 2020s and has moved into the field of applied discussions on the prospects for self-sufficient systems of pharmaceutical production⁴⁵, financial distribution⁴⁶, food security⁴⁷, and so on.

A series of global crises contributed significantly to these discussions: the coronavirus pandemic, followed by the aftermath of the global economic crisis caused by the events in Ukraine and economic sanctions, which demonstrated the dependence of African economies and political systems on the global environment. In general, the growing relevance of the concept of self-reliance is linked to the crisis of the current model of globalization based on neoliberal approaches. As Russian political philosopher Eduard Batalov demonstrates, “In recent years—especially in connection with the current crisis, which is not only financial and economic in its nature but also ideological and values-related—obvious has become the failure of the philosophy of that model of globalization, within which it took place and which, as David Harvey showed, was formed on the basis of the principles of neoliberalism” [Batalov 2012].

When considering self-reliance in the African energy context, it is necessary to state that at this stage, the necessary infrastructure, as well as the competences, financial resources, and technologies to support it, are currently lacking. African countries are

⁴³ Agenda 2063. Framework document. *African Union*. 2013. https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/33126-doc-framework_document_book.pdf (accessed: 29.06.2025)

⁴⁴ Regional value chains in Africa for better global integration. *OECD*. 2020. <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/en/data-insights/regional-value-chains-in-africa-for-better-global-integration> (accessed: 10.03.2024)

⁴⁵ Basak S. As Africa seeks greater pharma self-reliance, think generics. *World Bank Blogs*. 2022. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/health/africa-seeks-greater-pharma-self-reliance-think-generics> (accessed: 29.06.2025)

⁴⁶ Africa's financial self-reliance is not self-isolation, but a commitment to base development on own resources: Ministers of Finance. *African Union*. 22.06.2022. <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20220622/africas-financial-self-reliance-not-self-isolation-commitment-base> (accessed: 29.06.2025)

⁴⁷ Africa's journey to self-sufficiency: The power of intra-Africa trade. *AGRA*. 2023. <https://agra.org/news/daniel-njiwa-africas-journey-to-self-sufficiency-the-power-of-intra-africa-trade/> (accessed: 29.06.2025)

critically dependent on extraregional players [Gebreselassie et al. 2023] and their respective financing, technology, competences, and knowledge. In general, this is a consequence of the structural power of Western countries—over security (including control over energy supply routes), production (including the IEA), finance, and knowledge [Strange 1994]. In this context, the maximalist interpretation of self-reliance seems inappropriate.

At the same time, a softer alternative proposed by the Norwegian researcher Johann Galtung, *collective self-reliance* [Galtung 1977], is available, which implies closer cooperation between the countries of the Global South. This interpretation widens the window for Russia and other non-Western countries to participate in ensuring the energy sovereignty of African countries.

In the case of energy, such a collective approach should be expressed in the intensification of regional energy cooperation among African countries—*energy regionalization* or *sub-regionalization*. This will contribute not only to energy security but also to the creation of additional large markets within the region. Given the high spatial fragmentation of energy systems, uneven distribution of resources, and structural asymmetry between energy exporting and importing countries, deepening interstate energy cooperation in Africa is of strategic importance. Regional integration will make it possible to optimize transport and energy infrastructure, justify the economic feasibility of implementing high-capacity projects, reduce costs, improve the reliability of supply, and stimulate investment in the energy sector. One of the promising areas may be the development of intra-regional electricity markets within the framework of the so-called energy pools [Sharova 2024: 535].

In addition, regional integration creates institutional prerequisites for the development of a coordinated policy in the field of energy regulation and tariffs, aimed primarily at increasing the consumption of African resources within the region. This process will require the gradual localization of production of the means of production while maintaining the same volume of production of manufactured goods (for the period of building of production capacities within Africa), which will require the expansion of imports of both energy carriers themselves and knowledge-intensive products and services necessary for Africa's energy sector development (including those from Russia).

Russia's interest may lie not only in exporting goods, technologies, services, and knowledge but also in promoting the development of domestic energy markets in Africa [Maslov et al. 2021]—because such development creates a natural alternative to exporting raw materials to world markets, which during crises destabilizes these markets—since the lack of large domestic markets and reserve systems in most countries forces exporters to dump goods when there is an oversupply⁴⁸. At the same time, the development of domestic consumption, inter-country energy trade, and reserve systems in African countries may well lead to the fact that African consumption itself will absorb most of the energy production and stabilize world markets in the long term.

⁴⁸ Analysis: Nigerian crude struggling to clear as market share battle kicks off. *S&P Global*. 12.03.2020. <https://www.spglobal.com/commodityinsights/en/market-insights/latest-news/oil/031220-analysis-nigerian-crude-struggling-to-clear-as-market-share-battle-kicks-off> (accessed: 29.06.2025)

It is important to emphasize that Africa's energy resources already largely support the development of non-Western economies: for example, African countries provide about 10% of oil, gas, coal, and petroleum product exports to India and China each year, so the latter may be interested in maintaining exports from Africa at the same level while domestic consumption stagnates. In this regard, there is a need for a common framework for cooperation that considers the interests of both African economies and their partners, who depend to varying degrees on African energy. Exporting countries with their own competences and technologies, as well as experience in balancing the export and consumption of energy resources, such as Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Algeria, and Egypt, can play an important role in such cooperation.

As a leading player in the global commodity markets, Russia is interested in developing the processing industry where raw materials are extracted. This manifests a natural commonality of long-term interests between Russia and African countries, which can become the basis for solving the problem of energy poverty and limited access to energy resources. In the case of Africa, processing energy resources for the countries' own needs may mean not only solving energy-related issues but also achieving more sustainable models of economic growth through the production of fertilizers, cement, polypropylene, and other products.

CONCLUSION

Russia-Africa energy cooperation, despite its long history and strategic potential, remains largely underconceptualized to date. The results of the study show that most key Russian strategies, including the Russian Energy Strategy until 2030, 2035, and even 2050, either mention Africa in a fragmented manner or exclusively in the context of coal exports. This is somewhat at odds with the content of bilateral declarations and statements at Russia-Africa Summits, where energy is considered in a broader and more meaningful context [Andreeva et al. 2023]. A systematic analysis of Russia's strategic and foreign policy documents indicates a certain divergence between foreign policy objectives and sectoral approaches to energy cooperation with African countries. While the Energy Strategy is primarily oriented towards a trade-focused model, summit declarations and the Foreign Policy Concept outline a broader and more comprehensive vision of partnership. This opens opportunities for further updating and complementing strategic documents, as well as for discussing the prospects of cooperation with the active involvement of African experts and scholars.

One of the central points of the article is the analysis of competitive and cooperative elements in Russia's energy relations with African countries. On the one hand, Russia and some African states may indeed compete for markets, especially for gas, but such risks can be managed. An example is the history of Russia's energy relations with Algeria, where, despite potential competition, the parties managed to build coordination mechanisms within the framework of the GECF and OPEC+, as well as to establish practical cooperation at the level of state corporations. On the other hand, in most cases, competition between Russia and Africa in energy markets is either minimal or is driven by Western transnational corporations controlling export flows from Africa. This allows us to rethink the idea of a confrontational approach and consider opportunities for cooperation.

It is in overcoming institutional constraints—first, the dominance of transnational companies, a lack of state control over export infrastructure, and weakness of the regulatory and technological framework—that one of the main objectives of cooperation may lie. The article shows that energy cooperation should not be limited to the supply of raw materials or equipment and requires a deeper elaboration of objectives, formats, and conceptual bases. Special attention is paid to the concepts of energy security, energy sovereignty, and self-reliance as reflecting not only Russia's interests but also the approaches of African states.

Russia's participation in the creation of regional energy clusters, cross-border infrastructure, and the localization of production facilities and personnel training can contribute to a more sustainable energy architecture on the continent. Attention should be paid to the potential of the energy sector regionalization—the development of regional and sub-regional energy markets within Africa, which is especially important given the highly fragmented nature of African energy systems and uneven distribution of resources. Russia, in its turn, can act not only as an energy supplier but also as a technological and investment partner, contributing to the development of energy infrastructure and competences.

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КОНЦЕПТУАЛЬНЫЕ ОСНОВЫ РОССИЙСКО-АФРИКАНСКОГО СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВА В СФЕРЕ ЭНЕРГЕТИКИ

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СВИРИДОВ Всеволод Юрьевич, заместитель директора, Центр изучения Африки, аспирант, Национальный исследовательский университет «Высшая школа экономики», Москва, Российская Федерация. ORCID: 0000-0002-0466-9727. E-mail: vsviridov@hse.ru

Аннотация. Энергетика – одно из ключевых направлений российско-африканских отношений наряду с военно-техническим, продовольственным и промышленным сектором. За последние три десятилетия российские компании накопили значительный опыт в энергетическом секторе стран Африки, реализовав проекты по добыче полезных ископаемых, строительству инфраструктуры, поставкам топлива и продвижению российских атомных технологий. Однако стремительное усложнение международных энергетических связей, трансформация глобальных режимов и рост значения незападных

институтов требуют осмысления и корректировки концептуальных основ этого взаимодействия.

Цель статьи – концептуализация энергетического измерения российско-африканского партнерства, оценка тех доктринальных и нормативных условий, в которых это сотрудничество разворачивается. В статье анализируются теоретические и доктринальные рамки российско-африканского энергетического партнерства, его институциональное оформление и взаимосвязь с категориями энергетической безопасности и суверенитета. Особое внимание уделяется роли концепции опоры на собственные силы (*self-reliance*), традиционно значимой для политической мысли стран Африки, и ее сопряженности с российским подходом к энергетическому взаимодействию. Проанализированы не только потенциал взаимозависимости, но и конкурентные элементы в отношениях между Россией и африканскими экспортерами энергоресурсов. Системный анализ текстов стратегических и внешнеполитических документов Российской Федерации позволил выявить некоторую рассинхронизацию между внешнеполитическим и отраслевым подходами к энергетике на африканском направлении. Автор приходит к выводу, что в создании региональных энергетических кластеров, трансграничной инфраструктуры, локализации производств и подготовке кадров, а также в преодолении институциональных ограничений – в первую очередь, доминирования транснациональных компаний (ТНК), недостатка государственного контроля над экспортной инфраструктурой, слабости регуляторной и технологической базы – могут заключаться основные цели двустороннего сотрудничества.

Ключевые слова: российско-африканское сотрудничество; энергетическая безопасность; опора на собственные силы; энергетическая стратегия России; регионализация

Конфликт интересов: автор заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

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