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RUSSIAN INTEREST IN CENTRAL ASIA IN NATURAL/ENERGY RESOURCES

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ABSTRACT: *Natural/energy resources are considered as the key factors of the nation's economic development. In the modern world, energy has been considered as the lifeline since it is required in almost every human activity. In order to support national development, any country wants to exploit as much natural/energy resources as possible (Skipka and Theodore, 2014). The powerful countries are not only using their own resources but also paying interests to resources of other countries. This assessment tires to critically explore Russian interest in Central Asia in natural/energy resources.*

KEYWORDS: Energy, Resources, Economic Development, Russian, Asia

INTRODUCTION

Russia: A Short Overview

Russia is a sovereign state which is located at northern Eurasia and it is the world largest country with area of 16,299,981 square kilometres that accounts over one eighth of the total inhabitant earth. Similarly, it is the ninth largest country by population with 143.44 million in April, 2016 (Worldometers, 2016). It has all together 11 time zones with wider range of environments in different time zones. It shares boarder with several European and Asian countries.

Russia was founded and ruled by Varangian elites and their descendents for several years. Its culture is developed by synthesizing Byzantine and Slavic culture (Riasanovsky and Steinberg, 2011). In the Medieval age Rus ruled Russia but later on it is disintegrated into several states. Most of those states were governed by the Mongol invasion but later on the Rus unified some states and got independence from Golden Horde. The kievan Rus gradually became stronger and started to expand its Russian Empire in 18th century. It was the third largest empire in the world (Bushkovich, 2011).

Russia is the first socialist state and one of the world superpowers in the modern age. In 20th century it had considerably developed in the field of science and technology (Bushkovich, 2011). At that time, it became able to send man in space at first time. Currently, it is one of the world largest economies and it is powerful from military power as well. It has mass destructive weapons along with nuclear bombs. It is the second biggest weapon exporter country in the world (SIPRI, 2016). It is a permanent member of United Nations Security Council and members of other several powerful organizations.

Mineral and energy are its key resources that support the national economy. It is the largest energy reserve in the world. In Russian development, there is prominent role of the natural energy and it knows that for its sustainable development, it has to conserve the natural energy (Kort, 2008). Russia acknowledges it and wants to import natural energy from different

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countries. According to Blagov (2016) Russia has been increasing its interest to the Central Asia in the energy or natural resources. Currently, it has discontinued gas import from TurkmenGaz in order to increase import form Central Asian Suppliers called Uzbekistan. This kind of decision has increased pressure on Ashgabat about pipeline in Central Asia. After this decision, the Turkmen president agreed to continue Pricaspiysky pipeline with 733 kilometres with capacity of 30 billion cubic meters per year (Ziegler, 2009).

Central Asia's Energy

According to World Bank (2016) Central Asia (CA) comprises of the five countries such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Kazakhstan is one of the richest countries in the natural energy including coal, oil, natural gas and uranium. Along with non-renewable energy, it has equal potentiality to produce renewable energies from solar, wind, hydro and biomass (Karatayev and Clarke, 2014). At present, it has been depending on the fossil fuels where the 75% of the total power has been generated by coal fired plants but it is not applicable for the point of view of sustainability and greenhouse gas emissions perspectives. The energy demand has been increasing in Kazakhstan; so its economic growth has been increased. As it has equal opportunity in renewable energy, it has to balance sources of energies considering sustainability and the environment. According to (Karatayev and Clarke, 2014) due to the lack of skilful human resource, technology, economy, etc. it has not deployed renewable resources to the required level.

Similarly, Kyrgyz Republic is a small country which is located at the heart of Central Asia It's population is about 5.3 million and it has larger reserve of coal but there is not much natural gas and oil reserve. In case of renewable resource, it is wealthy in endowment of water by which it can generated over 142 billion kWh energy but it has been using less than 10% of its capacity (Kaliyev, 2014).

Likewise, Tajikistan is the smallest country of Central Asia and it is landlocked. Its population is 8,008,990 (UNDP, 2016). After the independence from Russia, the electric subsidies are terminated and then it fulfilled its energy requirement by using coal and wood. It has estimated about 200 billion cubic feet of natural gas reserve (Global Security, 2016). It has high potentiality of hydropower; it has 4% of the world hydro power resource and 53% of Asian resources (UNDP, 2016). But, it has not able to explore and produce energy due to economic, human resource and technological barrier; thereby during winter, some areas of Tajikistan, the people get less than 4 hours electricity in a day.

In the same way, Turkmenistan's is also a small country which has about 4.96 million populations and its GDP is $18,269 million. It produces 77 billion cubic meters of natural gas per year and out of which 44 billion cubic meters is exported annually. It is very rich in the natural gas; it is estimated that it has over 17.5 trillion cubic meter gas reserve which is the world's largest reserve (Natural Gas Website, 2015).

Finally, Uzbekistan is also located at the heart of Central Asia and it is the most populated country which has 28 million populations. Its national GDP is $39 billion and it has great opportunity from the natural resources. It has adequate natural gas. It regarded as the second largest Caspian gas producer (World Energy Outlook, 2016). In Central Asia, it produces the highest electricity which has been exported to different countries and it has earned foreign currency.

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Russian Interest in Central Asia's Energy Resources

Energy can be broadly divided into two types: renewable and non-renewable. Currently, the world has been, mainly, depending on non-renewable energy and according to the expectation of Green Planet (2016) by 2035 there will be 32% petroleum, 25% natural gas, 20% coal, 9% nuclear and 14% renewable energy's demand. The non-renewable resources cannot be reproduced or growth as they come to the ending point. In this sense, for the future uses, some of the developed countries are trying to conserve their own resources by importing from different other countries. Russia has its adequate energy resources but currently it has been showing its interest over the resources of Central Asia. It is powerful in term of technological, political, economic, cultural, etc. perspectives. And it wants to show its strong influence in Central Asia and exploit the resources to its own uses (Rumer, 2015). The more it has access over the resources the more it can have opportunities to strengthen its prosperity and power.

Russia wants to be connected in Central Asia with energy pipe line because Central Asian countries are very close distance to its territory on the one hand and it has abundant level of resources on the other hand (Rumer, 2015). As it is connected by the pipeline with Central Asia and as it becomes able to establish its energy industries there to explore and produce energies, Russia can easily exploit the resources that add its further prosperity and power. By doing so, it can outsource necessary energy in cheaper cost and for long lasting as its wish.

In May 2007, the Russian, Kazakh, Turkmen and Uzbek leader agreed to develop Pipeline network in Central Asia (Blagov, 2016). Again in December 2007 Russia, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan signed in an agreement to build 1,700 kilometre pipeline. But as agreed, the projects could not come into practice. Due to the cleft between Moscow and Ashgabat, the ambitious plans could not be implemented. After explosion on Turkmengaz's pipeline, Gazporn terminated import of Turkmenistan's gas importation. After 2009, various attempts between Russia and Turkmenistan were done for Pricaspiysky gas pipeline but failed to sing on agreement. So, in the year of 2015 Turkman's gas export down to 4 bcm from 40 bcm in 2008 (Blagov, 2016). Anyway, Russian interest in Central Asia in natural resource has not ended yet rather it has been looking for a suitable opportunity.

Implications of Russian Interest in Natural/Energy Resources

The Central Asia is comprises of different types of geographical locations and it is quite rich in the natural resource. Russia is one of the largest energy importers of this region and if this region effectively utilizes the energy, it can be quickly developed. But currently, it has been just exploring the non-renewable resources. The involvement of Russia in the Central Asia has great impact because this region can sell the resources as it produces more than it requires (Petersen and Barysch, 2011). It is imperative to say that Central Asia has to be careful that only exporting non-renewable resources do not contribute its development. Instead of focusing on fossil fuel mining and exporting, it has to focus on the renewable industries for the sustainability.

Russian interest can be different than the interest of the Central Asian region. After getting independence, Central Asian countries have got political and economic instability. As the Central Asian region are not powerful, then it resources can be easily exploited by Russia to support its development. Russia wants to keep Central Asian region in its strategic grip by which it could get necessary resources (Petersen and Barysch, 2011). If Russia does not care

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about the energy of Central Asia, it will not get benefits from such neighbouring countries since there is possibility to apply energy security for the sustainability of the energy.

Central Asian countries can use Russia as the development partner to grow and develop renewable energy. If they because able to maximum utilize the resources considering the future and developing long lasting strategies, Russian interest can be great opportunity to them but otherwise it makes them worse economically, politically and culturally since it can be an impact area or the buffer zone of Russia.

CONCLUSION

Russia is interested in Central Asian energy, basically, from two perspectives: abundant natural resources and bordering countries. The Asian countries have massive natural petroleum reserve and they have great potentiality of the renewable energy including hydropower, solar power, wind power, etc. As they are very close by distance, the energy can be easily transported to Russia. Compared to other countries, the energy from the Central Asian countries can be cheaper from transportation and market point of view. Furthermore, these countries are not much capable to explore and produce resources economically and technologically. So that, Russia can participate in the production process by which its share can be secured and it can outsource energy for the long time duration. Furthermore, there is political instability and the countries are not powerful. In this situation, Russia can easily fulfil its interest to exploit natural resources. This region is rich not only non-renewable resources but it is also equally rich in term of renewable resources; thereby, from the sustainability perspective also, strong influence over the Central Asia can be imperative for Russia.

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