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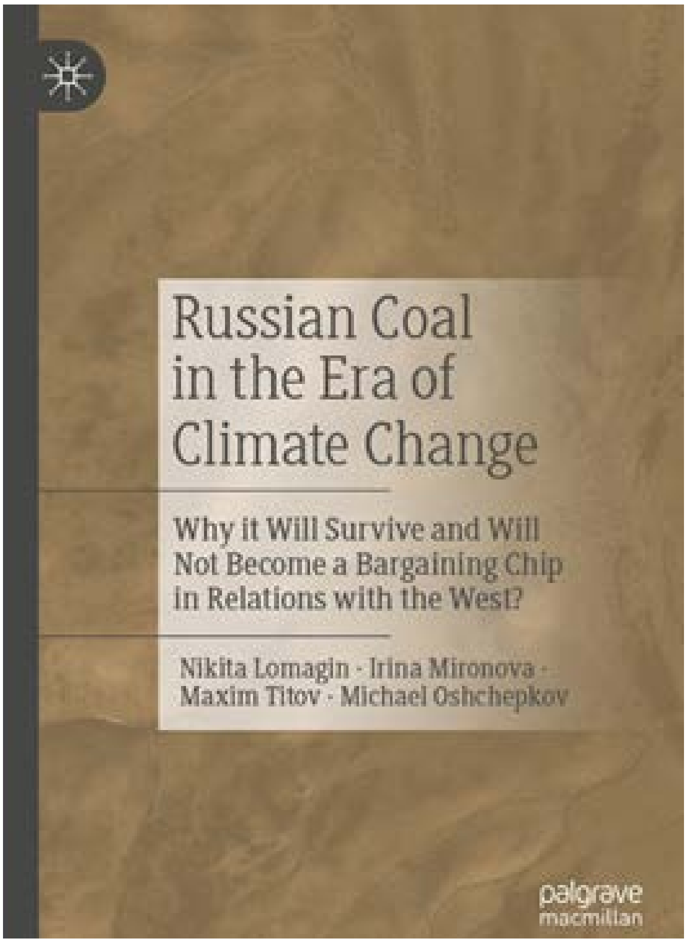
NEW BOOK BY THE ENERPO RESEARCH CENTER: RUSSIAN COAL IN THE ERA OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Nikita Lomagin, Irina Mironova, Maxim Titov *and* ***Michael Oshchepkov***

In 2023, a team of experts of the ENERPO Research Center including Nikita Lomagin, Irina Mironova, Maxim Titov and Michael Oshchepkov has completed a book on past, present and future of the Russian coal industry. The book was published by the Palgrave in November.

The book is unique for several reasons. First, it aims at interdisciplinary analysis of the oldest energy sector in Russia and addresses a series of questions that are relevant for experts in Russian studies, energy security, climate change, and global political economy. What does the coal sector mean for Russia? Will nostalgia for the Soviet legacy in Putin's Russia be embodied, inter alia, in the USSR's superstar miner Alexei Stakhanov — a poster man for communism and a symbol of a new workers' movement dedicated to increasing production, does it translate into the state's support of miners today? Conversely, this support might stem from bitter lessons of the late 1980s and early 1990s when the overall economic crises in the Soviet Union fuelled miners' political activity that substantially contributed to the eventual collapse of the planned economy and the disintegration of the country. Besides its key role in providing energy security in more than a dozen Russian regions, in particular Eastern Siberia and the Far East, coal mining is still economically crucial for regions that are heavily dependent on coal production.



Second, the book sheds light on the political economy of doing business in Russia in coal and the nature of Russian dirigisme in energy politics. The fact that the export of coal brings Russia about $15–17 billion USD per year implies not only the high degree of competitiveness of private coal mining companies but also assumes a great deal of potential for lobbying to obtain different types of support including new licenses, tax relief, and transport subsidies. Who are the main stakeholders in the coal business in Russia? What are the primary interests of miners at home and abroad? How do coal businesses and coal regions lobby their interests? Who are the main opponents of coal mining domestically and why? Which place does coal production occupy in the Russian energy security model and what is happening when Russian coal competes with Russian gas abroad, particularly in Asia?

Third, the book addresses some hard economic realities working against the world's shared climate goals. Global energy demand is steadily increasing as economies advance and nations develop, but the supply of renewable energy alternatives like wind and solar is not keeping pace. Simply put, there are severe supply constraints on rapidly expanding use of electric vehicles, wind turbines and other mainstays of sustainable renewable energy. Thus, absent green alternatives, the energy supply continues to be largely a competition between different fossil fuels and coal appears to be winning currently. Additionally, the price of energy has skyrocketed.

Finally, given the current crises in Russian relations with the West, some believe that the Kremlin could sacrifice its coal sector for the sake of rapprochement with the West, but how realistic is this hope? Will Russia instead work together with other potentially affected states and invoke WTO norms to protect its coal sector against the assertiveness of international 'Greens'?

The book is available on the website: https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-981-99-5370-7.