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Running out of excuses? Norwegian political and policy discourses justifying oil and gas development in the Arctic

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Abstract: In this article, we analyse how energy security are woven into political discourses among Norwegian policymakers after the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the consequences of this for intergenerational justice and environmental concerns more broadly. Preceding justifications centred on state revenue and domestic economic growth, the current discourse focuses on the European need for security of supply, and energy commodities in particular. The recent development has established a discourse we call "Drilling for European Energy Security". Through a securitized narrative building on Russian aggression, European needs are constructed as arguments for increasing the tempo of Norwegian oil and gas production, as well as intensifying exploration. By employing the intergenerational justice lens, the article exposes this approach as disconnected from the needs of domestic and European consumers, i.e., energy services. Furthermore, we analyse narratives regarding the recently approved electrification of the Snøhvit field in the Barents Sea, and how policymakers have co-opted what was initially regional counterarguments against the electrification. We argue that this exposes the policymakers dedication to continue the long-standing narrative based on 'clean oil and gas', perceived as contributing to secure both civil legitimacy and competitiveness in the international oil and gas market.

Keywords: Norway, Barents Sea, intergenerational justice, oil, gas, petroleum.

(A) INTRODUCTION

When Norway first found oil, there were substantial parliamentarian discussions on which policy direction to follow. The result of these negotiations can be found in the 1974 White Paper *The Role of Petroleum Activities in Norwegian Society*.[1] Several principles and policy goals were set. One important discussion was the pace of extraction; it was decided that moderation was the main approach, which translated into the policy of not exceeding 90 million barrels of oil equivalents per year to avoid a "swift and uncontrolled growth in the use of material resources" (p. 6). Furthermore, this was anchored in the norm that "economic growth must […] be given a new meaning and new composition so that it contributes to a reasonable use of resources and do not destroy the basic balance in nature".[2] In addition, in anticipation of what kind of dilemmas petroleum development might bring, the white paper contained language that outlined both Norway's responsibilities to other countries and future generations:

[1] Ministry of Finance, 'St. meld. nr. 25 (1973 - 1974)', 1974.
[2] *Ibid.*

> Despite unresolved tasks, Norway is among the countries with the highest standard of living in the world. The discoveries of oil will raise our standard of living even further. We have a particular responsibility in a world that is characterized by fundamental economic and social inequality. We should therefore give the countries that need it the most, part of the increased revenues.[3]

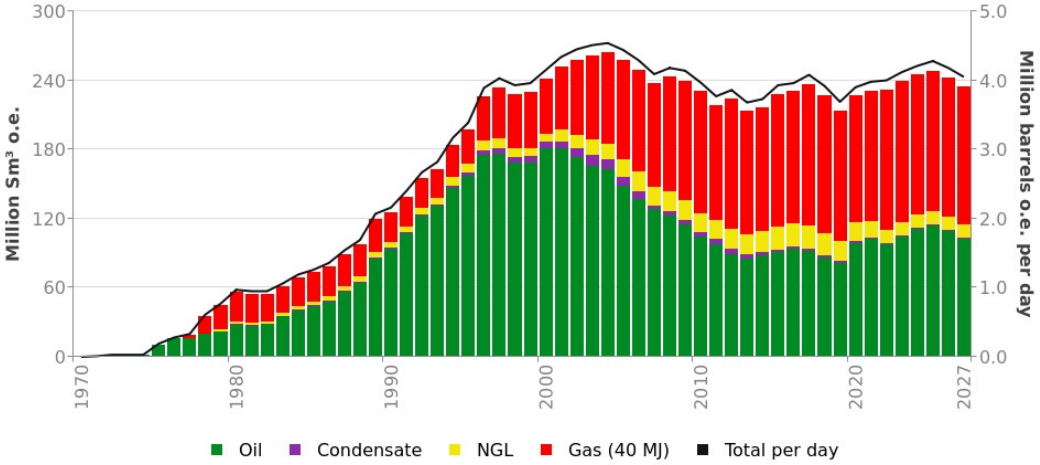

Figure 1: Historic and projected production (Norwegian petroleum Directorate 2023).[4]

As depicted in Figure 1, Norway deviated from the self-imposed policy of a moderate pace of extraction in the late 1980s and overall production peaked in the mid 2000s. The figure also shows that around 2010, the extraction pace of natural gas and oil were about equal. These shifts have been accompanied by changes in the official policy discourse and the establishment of the Norwegian Oil Fund in the early 1990s. The fund allowed a free flow of investments and production in the petroleum sector and was rebranded as the Government Pension Fund Global in 2006. In 2023, the fund accounted for 1.4 trillion dollars, the highest value among sovereign wealth funds in the world.

In this paper, we report and synthesize the results of a study intended to shed light on the political activity related to the recent political decision to electrify the oldest of the oil and gas installations in the Barents Sea, namely Snøhvit. In sum, our research indicates that the Norwegian energy policymakers present the narrative of European energy security as the principal justification for Norwegian natural gas development. They also present the interventions required for electrifying Snøhvit as measures aimed at developing Finnmark and fostering regional economic growth, which has co-opted the main regional objections against the electrification. However, this framing falls apart when scrutinized through the lens of intergenerational justice. These narratives are not only constructed on a notion of energy security that is incompatible with the ongoing decarbonisation effort, they effectively narrow possible economic development options temporally and sectorally. We open the paper with a brief historic background of the

[3] *Ibid*., at 15.
[4] Norwegianpetroleum.no, downloaded September 23, 2023.

aforementioned discourse. We continue with the analysis of Norwegian discourse on European energy security before we switch to an analysis of alleged environmental and economic benefits of oil and gas developments in Norway by using the electrification of the Snøhvit natural gas field and Melkøya liquefied natural gas (LNG) processing plant as an example.

Norwegian policy and political discourses reflect how society's relation to petroleum has also changed over time. A number of studies have highlighted how Norwegian policymakers, through their use of particular narratives, have played a crucial role in shaping power dynamics and social realities in the development of oil and gas policies in Norway over the past thirty years.[5, 6, 7] Here we argue that this can be attributed to two factors: (1) the critical role of state imperatives in directing Norwegian oil and gas policy,[8] and (2) continuous discourse co-optation the adoption and manipulation of counterarguments by policy-makers to support points that counter-arguments were originally intended to undermine. Such co-optation is possible through the use of discourses that influence how individuals perceive and engage with the world, thereby either reproducing existing social norms and power structures, or instigating transformative shifts in societal understandings and action.[9, 10] Particular interpretations of language can constrain how people perceive phenomena and policy decisions, thus shaping the understanding of what is possible and acceptable to do in any specific situation.[11]

In the larger study underlying this paper, discourse is understood as a coherent set of texts and their production practices, dissemination, and reception that enable an object to emerge.[12] We apply the 'critical realist' framework by Scrase and Ockwell,[13, 14] rooted in the core state imperatives of economic growth, civil legitimacy, revenue, state survival, and domestic order. We find Handeland and Langhelles' definition of 'state survival'

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5 L. C. Jensen, 'Boring som miljøargument? Norske petroleumsdiskurser i nordområdene' 64(3): *Internasjonal Politikk* (2006), pages 295-309. https://doi.org/10.18261/ISSN1891-1757-2006-03-02

6 L. C. Jensen., 'Seduced and surrounded by security: A post-structuralist take on Norwegian High North securitizing discourses' 48(1): *Cooperation and Conflict* (2013), pages 80-99. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836712461482

7 B. Kristoffersen, 'Opportunistic Adaptation: New Discourses on Oil, Equity and Environmental Security' in K. O. Brien and E. Selboe (eds) *The adaptive challenge of climate change* (2015), pages 140-159. (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge) https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139149389.009

8 T. S. Handeland, and O. Langhelle, 'A Petrostate's Outlook on Low-Carbon Transitions: The Discursive Frames of Petroleum Policy in Norway' 14(17): *Energies* (2021), 5411. https://doi.org/10.3390/en14175411

9 I. Scrase, and D. G. Ockwell, 'Energy Issues: Framing and Policy Change', in I. Scrase, and D. G. Ockwell (eds) *Energy for the Future: A New Agenda* (2009), pages 35-53. (Palgrave Macmillan, London). https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230235441_3

10 Ø. H. Skånland, '"Norway is a peace nation": A discourse analytic reading of the Norwegian peace engagement' 45(1): Cooperation and Conflict (2010), pages 34-54. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836709347212

11 I. B. Neumann, 'Discourse Analysis' in A. Klotz and D. Prakash (eds), *Qualitative Methods in International Relations: A Pluralist Guide* (2008), pages 61-77. (Palgrave Macmillan: London) https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230584129_5

12 I. Parker, 'Discourse dynamics: Critical analysis for social and individual psychology' (1992) (Routledge, London and New York). https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315888590

13 I. Scrase and D. G Ockwell, op. cit.

14 I. Scrase, and D. G. Ockwell, 'The role of discourse and linguistic framing effects in sustaining high carbon energy policy An accessible introduction' 38(5): *Energy Policy* (2010), pages 2225-2233. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2009.12.010

as relevant in our analysis as "the ability to compete internationally in supplying the world with petroleum in an increasingly carbon-constrained world" in other words, maintaining competitiveness in the international oil and gas market.[15] According to Scrase & Ockwell, the state prioritizes solutions aligning with these imperatives, with other issues (such as environmental concerns) receiving lower priority unless connected to the imperatives. The authors also specify four energy policy goals (EPG) that most states pursue, namely access, security, efficiency, and environment. 'Environment' and 'efficiency' focus on sustainable energy production, economic efficiency, and resource conservation. 'Access' and 'security' address energy availability for a decent standard of living and dependable supply.

The data collection for the underlying study took place between November 2022 and March 2023, with an explicit focus on white papers published after the Russian invasion, along with relevant parliamentarian debates. This follows from a primary focus towards how the official Norwegian oil and gas discourse changed after the outbreak of the war. For this article, the data collection occurred between May and August 2023, encompassing white papers, parliamentarian debates and regional newspaper debates in Finnmark. Newspaper data was gathered from the Retriever database, focusing on electrification debates regarding Snow White. Official documents were sourced from the Norwegian parliament (Stortinget) and government (Regjeringen) websites. The selection was done manually, based on the 'cultural competence'[16] of the authors.

(B) HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The historical backdrop of discourse co-optation exposes three factors that play a role when policymakers today argue for what can be termed *drilling for European energy security*.[17] The first reflects how the Kyoto Protocol in 1990s and 2000s allowed for Norway to continue to produce oil and gas while paying other countries for lowering emissions (through carbon trading or offsets). Instead of aiming for 'national action', the discourse changed to 'global action' through carbon trading.[18] Secondly, as exploration intensified into Arctic territories during the 2000s, and especially when the first gas field in the Barents Sea was developed (Snøhvit), the discourse "drilling for the environment" evolved.[19] Here, it was not only important to get a head start on Russia in order to 'set an example' in terms of environmental risks and standards. The discourse also entailed a story about the positive environmental attributes of petroleum development in the

15 T. S. Handeland and O. Langhelle, op. cit., at 4.

16 I. B. Neumann, op. cit., at 63.

17 B. M. Ballo, 'Drilling for European energy security? Changes in Norwegian petroleum discourses after the outbreak of the Ukraine war'. Master thesis at *UiT The Arctic University of Norway:* https://munin.uit.no/handle/10037/29689.

18 E. Hovden, and G. Lindseth, 'Discourses in Norwegian Climate Policy: National Action or Thinking Globally?' 52(1): *Political studies* (2004), 63-81. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2004.00464.x

19 L. C. Jensen, 'Petroleum discourse in the European Arctic: the Norwegian case' 43(3): *Polar Record* (2007), pages 247-254. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0032247407006559

Barents Sea on the Norwegian side. This was in part enabled by co-opting the counter discourse of refraining from petroleum development in the name of conservation.[20]

The Kyoto mechanisms also allowed flexible interpretations of climate policy options. The official oil and gas policy discourse reflected that developing fields in the north was a positive climate measure, as it was argued that Norway had less emissions per produced barrel than other oil producing states, thus possessing the 'cleanest' oil and gas in the world. Although this was statistically proven wrong, an argument of 'drilling for climate change' were established amongst Norwegian political elites, and even the changing geography of the Arctic landscape was seen as an opportunity for more oil and gas development, as the polar ice cap was retreating.[21] Further, increased production in Norway was framed as a prerequisite for economic development in the Global South through the discourse 'drilling for global development', framing Norway's task as ensuring a steady flow of oil and gas into world markets. In this discourse, the burden-sharing aspects relating to creating carbon headroom for the developing world were co-opted by the argument of reducing the gap between the rich and the poor through energy interdependencies.[22] With these discourses established, the road towards drilling in the Barents Sea was seen as the natural next step for Norwegian petroleum industry.

(C) DRILLING FOR EUROPEAN ENERGY SECURITY

Between 2011 and 2018, the official Norwegian oil and gas policy narratives were discursively constructed around the state imperatives of revenue and in particular economic growth, along with EPG environment. The attention to financial matters is evident in a 2011 white paper from the Ministry of Petroleum and Energy (MPE) titled *An Industry for the Future – Norway's Petroleum Activities*, where it is stated that "The primary objective of petroleum policy is to facilitate the profitable production of oil and gas within a long-term perspective".[23] This is a clear discursive link between oil and gas production, state revenue, economic growth and the resource-making practices of the Norwegian government that is set to build policy around these imperatives. As the White paper clearly states, revenue and economic growth "depends on how much of the remaining resources are exploited", and the governments hold a "commitment to existing fields, to new profitable field developments and exploration [that] will provide a basis for a high and stable activity level in the future as well" [ibid]. A high level of production and exploration of new areas is clearly framed as a necessity to fulfil the imperatives of revenue and economic growth. These imperatives in turn contribute to securing the legitimation imperative, which is reinforced by the focus on environmental concerns through EPG resource efficiency and EPG environment. For example,

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20 L. C. Jensen, 'Norwegian petroleum extraction in Arctic waters to save the environment: introducing "discourse co-optation" as a new analytical term' 9(1): *Critical Discourse Studies* (2012), pages 29-38. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0032247407006559

21 B. Kristoffersen, op. cit.

22 At the core of this conflict is the argument of developing countries, where they claim that the industrialized countries in the Global North have a moral responsibility to reduce their emissions substantially prior to developed countries, where many of the world's poorer nations have fought hard for their right to develop. See Kristoffersen, op. cit., at 151.

23 Ministry of Petroleum and Energy, 'An Industry for the Future Norway's Petroleum Activities'. 2011, at 6.

arguments framing Norway's production methods as yielding the world's cleanest oil and gas were "an integral component for a competitive Norwegian petroleum sector and one important justification for its continuation".[24] In this situation, the counter-discourse was not able to restructure the official discourse in relation to economic and environmental issues, and consequently, the core framings in the official petroleum policy discourse were generally stable between 2011 and 2018.

The economic conditions also entail a focus on how to be competitive in the international oil and gas markets. In the White Paper that laid the groundwork for opening the Northeast Barents Sea for petroleum extraction in 2013, the MPE stated that:

> The increasing demand for more environmentally friendly and cleaner energy, for oil and gas as well as a strong emphasis on energy security, indicates favourable prospects for Norway's oil and gas exports. Norway has consistently upheld its reputation as a reliable and predictable supplier of oil and gas. Irrespective of all conceivable scenarios regarding future energy consumption, this factor will continue to provide Norway with a competitive advantage as an energy provider.[25]

In this excerpt, which is clearly formulated in economic terms, it is evident that the MPE believes that other states' energy security needs, combined with stronger demands for an acceptable environmental impact, justifies and legitimizes Norwegian petroleum exports. Thus, Norway's self-perceived image as a stable and predictable supplier is held as a competitive advantage in a market with "a strong emphasis on energy security". According to the MPE, this will contribute to a sustained high level of Norwegian petroleum exports, thereby ensuring the imperatives of survival, revenue, and economic growth.

However, since the outbreak of the war, the Norwegian reputation "as a reliable and predictable supplier of oil and gas" has been reframed. It is no longer a trait that is valuable mainly in terms of domestic revenue and economic growth, instead it is framed as a trait that is valuable in relation to the insufficient energy access and safety in Europe, here demonstrated by Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre speaking in parliament: "High and stable production on the Norwegian continental shelf is our most significant contribution to European energy security and stability at present. I perceive that this is understood and acknowledged in Europe. We are considered a reliable partner."[26]

The PM states that for Norway, it has become most important to ensure a constant flow of petroleum to Europe to provide our partners with sufficient energy access, rather than focusing on Norwegian revenues. This excerpt places European needs at the centre of attention, which was clearly shown not only here, but in the overall content of Støre's many speeches in parliament during the first nine months of the war, as well as the general activity in both the government and the parliament during the same time.

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24 T. S. Handeland and O. Langhelle, op. cit., at 12.

25 Ministry of Petroleum and Energy, 'New opportunities for Northern Norway – opening of the Barents Sea to the south-east for petroleum activities'. 2013, at 7.

26 Stortinget, *Stortingstidende Nr. 11,* 2022-2023, page 406.

In the MPE's statement from 2013, being 'reliable' is coupled with a 'competitive advantage', which is inextricably linked to economic features. Yet, since the outbreak of the war, it is the needs of "our allies, neighbours, and trading partners"[27] which makes the Norwegian reliability such an important trait. European needs serve as a direct justification for "maximum utilization of the capacity on the Norwegian continental shelf", with an explicit focus towards that this has "been of great importance in Europe".[28] References to the domestic dimensions of economic growth or revenue are not present in the official narrative during the first nine months or so after the Russian invasion. As these imperatives constituted the main justifications before the war, this is an important shift. It clearly changes who the benefits arising from the Norwegian petroleum industry accrue to, and it is obvious in a MPE white paper from 2022: "The government will [...] facilitate the Norwegian continental shelf to continue being a stable and long-term supplier of oil and gas to Europe in a demanding time."[29]

This new discourse based on European energy access is further reinforced through references to changes in the relationship between energy and security, as seen from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Anniken Huitfeldt, in May 2022: "Europe has a significant task ahead in becoming independent from Russian gas. Energy policy has now become a matter of security policy. For Norway, this means that maintaining stable and predictable Norwegian gas deliveries is not just about our economy. It also concerns the security of Europe."[30]

Huitfeldt makes a clear connection between Norwegian gas exports and European security, stating that energy policy now must be considered as security policy. In this regard, it is crucial that Europe become independent of Russian gas. This was quickly followed up the following month by a joint statement by Norway and the EU, declaring a strengthening of cooperation regarding energy:

> Norway is the biggest producer of oil and gas in Europe with a production contributing significantly to European energy security [...] the importance of Norway's oil and gas production for European energy security has increased [...] Norway has significant remaining oil and gas resources and can, through continued exploration, new discoveries and field developments, continue to be a large supplier to Europe also in the longer term beyond 2030. The EU supports Norway's continued exploration and investments to bring oil and gas to the European market.[31]

The statement draws a clear line from the security implications of the increased energy needs of Europe to the remaining oil *and* gas resources on the Norwegian continental shelf. It also clearly reflects how the pre-war discourse as a commitment to extensive exploration and investments are explicitly coupled with the European call

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27 J. G. Støre, 'Statsministerens redegjørelse for Stortinget om krigen i Ukraina og den sikkerhetspolitiske situasjonen'. 2022b.

28 Stortinget, *Stortingstidende Nr. 11*, 2022-2023, at 405-406.

29 Ministry of Petroleum and Energy, 'Meld. St. 11 (2021-2022) - Additional notice to Meld. St. 36 (2020-2021)'. 2022, at 14.

30 A. Huitfeldt, 'Speech on security policy and the High North'. 2022; Available from: https://www.regjeringen.no/no/aktuelt/tale_sikkpol_nord/id2912154/.

31 Ministry of Petroleum and Energy, 'Increased energy cooperation between the EU and Norway'. 2022, at 1-2.

for increased supplies. Despite the predominant European demand for natural gas, the joint statement consistently employ oil *and* gas.

Five months later, in May 2023, this was followed up by the MPE:

> As the largest petroleum producer in Europe, Norway's most significant contribution to European energy security is to maintain high gas deliveries to the market. […] To maintain high oil and gas deliveries in the future, ongoing production must be continued, and new resources brought into production. For new resources to be put into production, further discoveries must be made through exploration.[32]

As evident, the new narratives based on the link between Norwegian oil and gas, European security and energy needs is now presented as important arguments for further exploration and development of both oil *and* gas fields. Even when European demand is mainly natural gas, policymakers persistently use the collective terms *petroleum* or *oil and gas*. As such, European energy needs have been successfully linked to the image of Norway as a stable and long-term supplier to Europe, which has led to demands for new licensing rounds and development plans that include both oil and gas. Combined with the perception that Russia is waging an "energy war"[33] on Europe, this imposes significant constraints on both discourse and policy regarding oil and gas in Norway. These narratives have significantly impeded the breakthrough of competing considerations in Norwegian oil and gas policymaking, such as climate and environmental concerns.[34]

(D) DRILLING FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND LOCAL VALUE CREATION

Discovered in 1984 and approved for development in 2002, the Snøhvit gas field was the first field to be developed in the Barents Sea. Situated outside Hammerfest city in Finnmark county, the construction of the Melkøya production plant started in 2003, and production commenced in 2007. The gas is transported through a 145 km long pipeline to the production facility on Melkøya, where it is converted into LNG and loaded onto ships. The electrification reduces annual emissions by up to 850,000 tons and increases the total gas volume for export. This will require 3.6 TWh from the grid annually, which necessitate a substantial grid expansion.[35, 36] Critically, the project includes an onshore compressor that is expected to prolong production by approximately 20 years.[37] As such, the electrification of the processing plant at Melkøya is the direct reason for expanding the power grid.[38]

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32 Ministry of Petroleum and Energy, 'Prop. 97 S. 2022-2023'. 2023, at 34-35.

33 This expression has been commonplace in Norwegian energy policy matters since the Russian invasion, both in parliamentarian and media debates.

34 B. M. Ballo, op. cit.

35 The Office of the Prime Minister, 'Power and industry boost for Finnmark'. 2023. Available in Norwegian from: https://www.regjeringen.no/no/aktuelt/kraft-og-industriloft-for-finnmark/id2990581/

36 Minimum 54 km (Skaidi-Hammerfest), but the government's stated goal is 265 km (Skaidi-Hammerfest-Varangerbotn).

37 Equinor, 'Snøhvit-feltet'. 2023; Available from: https://www.equinor.com/no/energi/snohvit. Cited 13/09/23.

38 Stortinget, 'Dokument nr. 15:1417 (2022-2023)'. 2023.

Electrification of Snøhvit has long been a highly debated topic in Finnmark. Both before and after the government announced the decision to electrify, there were significant opposition towards the project among the population in Finnmark. This question dominated the regional political debates in the lead-up to the local and regional elections in September 2023. Based on the media debate, two factors stand out as particularly important for the resistance. First, Norwegian authorities have reserved the necessary power output in the electricity grid until the project is completed, at the earliest in 2030. This is widely perceived as socially unjust by regional actors, hindering the development of other businesses and industries in the area. Secondly, there are worries that the increased demand from Melkøya may contribute to rising electricity prices.

In August 2023, the government held a press conference at the production facility at Melkøya in Hammerfest. During this, PM Støre emphasized that half of the additional gas production Norway was able to initiate "during this war year" came from Melkøya, and "Because of that, this day is important also outside our own country".[39] By alluding to Russian aggression and warfare by employing the word *war*, Støre discursively establishes a direct link between the electrification and European needs. Hence, Putin's aggressive war on Ukraine makes up parts of the backdrop for the course of LNG production and associated energy expansions in Finnmark.

Up until this point, the regional resistance was not directly addressed in the official narratives. However, at this press conference the electrification was pitched as a "power and industrial boost for Finnmark", promising that Snøhvit will not be connected to the grid until 3.6 TWh of new annual production have been developed in the region. The most applicable method within the time frame of 2030 is area intensive wind farms, which will interfere with the indigenous Sami reindeer herding territory and wider ecological values present in the landscapes of Finnmark. This established a new narrative based on the infrastructure yielded by prolonging LNG production, arguing that this development addresses important needs regarding the economic development of the region. We see this as the most recent example of co-optation in the official Norwegian oil and gas discourse.

As electrification requires more power generation in the region and an upgraded electricity grid to Hammerfest, it will affect the landscapes in Finnmark. This is framed as unavoidable through the three-pronged framing of Norwegian oil and gas as both *clean* and *necessary* for alleviating European challenges in dealing with Russian aggression, all the while "creating value and giv[ing] possibilities in all of Finnmark" [ibid.]. The speech of PM Støre clearly aspires to address regional concerns related to economic growth and simultaneously establish Finnmark as a space for electricity production earmarked the petroleum industry: "This initiative includes measures that will make an impact, generate value, and provide opportunities throughout Finnmark, and indeed, throughout Northern Norway. (…) It will be a project where we're not going to end

[39] Office of the Prime Minister, 'The Prime Minister's Opening Statement at the Press Conference on Power and Industrial Boost for Finnmark'. 2023. Available in Norwegian from: https://www.regjeringen.no/no/aktuelt/statsministerens-innledning-pa-pressekonferansen-om-kraft-og-industriloft-for-finnmark/id2990595/

up with winners and losers. It's good for people, industry, and activity."[40] This excerpt succeeds connections between Norwegian oil and gas and European needs, and as such it is visibly an attempt to align 'drilling for European energy security' with regional value creation, thus constructing the electrification of Snow White as a sensible national policy.

The previous governmental narrative focused on local, national, and European effects (respectively jobs, revenue/economic growth, and energy security). Through the new-born narrative of petroleum-driven power grids and production as a pre-requisite for providing economic growth "throughout Northern Norway", the regional dimension is now clearly addressed in the governmental discourse. This indicates that regional energy policy is largely built to answer national energy policy goals, which expose the policymakers' dedication to sustaining a high level of petroleum exports, and thereby, their dedication to narratives like 'drilling for European energy security' and 'clean oil and gas'.

(E) INTERGENERATIONAL JUSTICE AND ENERGY SECURITY

The 1974 White Paper that we cite in the introduction to this paper outlines Norway's responsibilities to future generations. It also *states* that oil and gas are simply means of achieving what the paper deems as the end a high standard of living. Thus, capitalising on 'the discoveries of oil' is only desired as long as it leads to achieving the end. Sovacool et al. define energy security as "equitably providing available, affordable, reliable, efficient, environmentally benign, proactively governed and socially acceptable energy services to end-users".[41] This definition puts the concept of energy services, such as thermal comfort, industrial process heat, personal mobility, and many others, as the principal unit of analysis for energy security. Energy services are the benefits that primary energy, energy carriers, and end-use energy produce for human well-being. Sovacool et al. contrast their energy services security approach to the conventional understanding of energy security as security of supply.[42]

Defining energy security as the physical availability and economic affordability of energy commodity has been the go-to approach of a majority of energy *policymakers* around the world, including those of Norway. Sovacool et al. diverge from the tried and tested conventional approach to energy security because they aim to examine energy systems not just from security but also from justice and equity perspectives. This includes the concept of intergenerational justice that they utilise to identify and describe temporal inequities created by energy systems [ibid.]. Because energy services are a human-centric concept, it allows for a direct connection between what both present and future recipients of the well-being secured by energy and present and future communities impacted by the provision of energy services desire. This, in turn, allows

40 *Ibid.*

41 B. K. Sovacool, R. V. Sidortsov, and B. R. Jones, 'Energy Security, Equality and Justice' (2013), at 235. (Routledge, Oxon and New York). https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203066348

42 Sovacool, B.K., 'Conceptualizing urban household energy use: Climbing the "Energy Services Ladder' 39(3): *Energy Policy* (2011), pages 1659-1668. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2010.12.041

for a much wider range of options of the type of energy development, its priorities, timelines, and other important considerations that are essential for thoughtful energy *policymaking*. As a result, oil and gas development might no longer be the best means of achieving what the 1974 White Paper sees as the ultimate end.

In contrast, the Norwegian state interprets its intergenerational obligations in a narrow manner effectively tying them to the aforementioned Oil Fund, whose purpose is to "ensure responsible and long-term management of revenue from Norway's oil and gas resources, so that this wealth benefits both current and future generations".[43] This is frequently iterated by the Norwegian government, for example by MPE Aasland at the aforementioned press conference in front of Melkøya in August 2023: "Thanks to all of you who contribute every day to increased energy security in Europe, while ensuring a safety net for future generations in Norway, providing us with security and opportunities that few others enjoy."[44]

Aasland makes a clear discursive connection between increasing European energy security and "ensuring a safety net" for future generations through the oil fund. Not only is Norwegian oil and gas framed as a means to mitigate the negative effects of 'Putin's energy war' on our 'friends and allies' in Europe, but it also simultaneously contributes to the next generations through the revenues from present petroleum exports. This temporal monetized framing of future security takes a calculated risk of the fund losing its value that may come in many forms e.g., economic recessions, war, and climate risk.[45] When revisiting the past through the lens of policymakers in 1974, the risks associated with oil were quite the opposite: The expected economic growth had to be given a new content which included understanding the potential uneven distribution of risks and benefits in time and space. The white paper called for a "reasonable" use of resources and making sure that nature was in balance, acknowledging that the impacts were severe, even without a clear picture of the looming threat of climate change in the future. In the context of reading this white paper fifty years later, from before Norway became a petroleum dependent country, it not only shows concern regarding the distribution of goods and burdens between generations, it even warns 'us' against exploring for more oil than what we needed at a given time, as it would be too tempting to exploit them once they were found.[46]

Taking this into consideration today we see how intergenerational justice exposes the understanding of the security of supply employed by the policymakers as lacking a direct connection with what domestic and European consumers need, i.e., energy services. Secondly, keeping intergenerational justice as a premise for energy services security-centric decision-making allows for greater flexibility of the economic development options. Thirdly, anticipating intergenerational justice concerns ensures the temporal sustainability of energy development because it helps to legitimise such development beyond short-term challenges (e.g., the loss of Russian natural gas supply).

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43 Norges Bank, 'About the fund'. 2023; Available from: https://www.nbim.no/en/.

44 Ministry of Petroleum and Energy, 'The speech by the Minister of Oil and Energy at the press conference on the power and industrial development plan for Finnmark'. 2023.

45 M. Takle, 'The Norwegian Petroleum Fund: Savings for Future Generations?' 30(2): *Environmental Value* (2021) pages 147-167. https://doi.org/10.3197/096327120X15868540131305

46 Ministry of Finance, 'St. meld. nr. 25 (1973 - 1974)', 1974; at 6.

(F) CONCLUSION

In this paper, we do not attempt to provide a comprehensive critique of the conventional understanding of energy security as a security of supply. However, we expose the foundational weaknesses of this approach to energy security by illustrating how it failed to provide any guardrails for the political and policy discourse of Europe's major energy producer. Subjecting the recent discursive changes to the scrutiny of intergenerational justice deflates the justification and legitimisation narratives of this co-opted discourse. We also show that using energy services and not energy commodities as the starting point and unit of analysis can help to avoid the co-opted discourse problem. The energy services concept provides a direct link to what present and future European customers need and what present and future Norwegian communities would like to avoid when the services are delivered. Simply put, Norway is running out of excuses for not recognising the deficiency of the current energy policy-making tools and ignoring the co-opted discourse problem. This is something that the current and future generations cannot afford.

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