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RUSSIAN APPROACHES TO NATURAL GAS COOPERATION IN NORTHEAST ASIA

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Northeast Asia plays a growing role in Russian foreign policy because Moscow aims to use its economic relations with Asian states to enhance the economic development and comprehensive security of the Russian Far East and eastern Siberia. Moreover, Russian regional involvement as an important and reliable energy supplier could contribute substantially to multilateral cooperation in Northeast Asia.

Recent events demonstrated that Moscow has been gradually assuming a greater commitment to developing the RFE: the Russian government has fulfilled its obligation to invest domestic funds in a sizable part of the region's multibillion dollar infrastructure projects. Foreign investors have long awaited such a positive signal (Sevastyanov 2005b:145). At the same time, other components of the Russian NEP – the limits placed on foreign investments and the preferential treatment given to the two largest state-owned companies (Gazprom and Rosneft) in recent years – have changed the playing field for foreign investors in the energy sector.

In January 2007 Putin approved a proposal allowing two state-owned companies (Gazprom and Rosneft) to share equally in oil and gas extraction in projects on the Russian continental shelf. This decision effectively blocks foreign companies from getting a major share in these projects.

Gazprom has always been the number one company in Russia – a clear favorite of consecutive Presidents (Yeltsin, Putin, Medvedev). In addition to its high stakes in energy projects, the gas giant is buying shares in related economic sectors (coal mining, organic chemicals, electricity) as well as in the media. Moreover, in 2006 the RF presidential administration resurrected an idea to increase the share of coal in the Russian internal fuel balance from the current 13% to 35% in 2015 thus giving Gazprom a practical opportunity to sell more gas abroad.

The RFE is a critical area for Gazprom's expanded investment activities. In the short-term, first it will sell Sakhalin gas to local consumers in the RFE and later to foreign partners. By 2011 Gazprom plans to prolong Sakhalin through Khabarovsk all the way to Vladivostok. This will make it possible to achieve Gazprom's goal of making gas available to both residents of the RFE and NEA countries.

Gazprom chose to use gas from the Sakhalin-3 project to supply its domestic and foreign customers. This project consists of four gas and oil fields producing more than 700 million tons of oil and 1.3 billion cubic meters of gas. By comparison, together the Sakhalin-1 and Sakhalin-2 projects produce about 450 million tons of oil and 1 billion cubic meters of gas. Gazprom's selection of Sakhalin-3 as its principal source of gas indicates the priority it places on the Sakhalin projects, while developing the gas from the Kovykta field in Siberia appears to be a more distant goal.