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Developing the Oil and Gas Complex during the Cold War – Challenges and Dilemmas for the Soviet Political Leadership

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Why did the Soviet economy and, in general, the Soviet Union, become dependent on rents from oil and gas exports? The conventional answer to this question is that in the 1960s, huge oil and gas resources in Western Siberia were discovered, and in the 1970s, as global prices for oil increased, the Soviet leaders decided to expand the export of oil and gas to the world market; as a consequence, massive amounts of petrodollars began flowing into the Soviet economy, domestic reforms were put on hold and the Soviet economy became increasingly dependent on rents generated from sales of oil and gas abroad. Until the opening of formerly closed Soviet archives, we knew very little about the concrete motivation and perspectives of the Soviet actors involved in energy policy making. New insights from recently de-classified Soviet documents allow, for the first time, to gain a deeper understanding of the ways key Soviet actors understood the development of the oil and gas complex and how the decision-making process worked. Based on a wide range of new archival material from Russian archives, this paper offers a new interpretation of the history of the development of the Soviet oil and gas complex, explaining how the views of party leaders Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev and their advisers informed Soviet energy strategy during the 1960s and 1970s. This paper will touch on a range of issues such as the value Soviet leaders attached to oil, gas and trade, the rivalry of interest groups in the Soviet economy, the impact of Western economic sanctions, as well as the ways technological problems in the Soviet oil and gas industry were viewed and discussed in Moscow.

Studierende und Interessierte sind herzlich eingeladen.

Um Anmeldung wird gebeten: cees@hist.uzh.ch