

Framing The Energy Crisis: An Analysis of CNN's Media Hegemony in EU Energy Crisis Coverage

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ABSTRACT: This study analyzes CNN's framing of the European Union (EU) energy crisis (2022–2025), shaped by the REPowerEU initiative and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It fills a gap in international media studies by examining how global news outlets construct hegemonic narratives around energy geopolitics. Using Robert N. Entman's four-element framing model and Savaş Çoban's (2018) seven dimensions of media hegemony, the study employs a qualitative interpretivist approach to 30 CNN articles. The findings reveal a consistent framing that attributes the crisis to Russian aggression, portrays the EU as morally resilient, and advances technocratic, market-oriented remedies aligned with neoliberal orthodoxy, while marginalizing oppositional voices, social inequalities, and non-Western perspectives. Theoretically, the research contributes by bridging framing analysis with a critical perspective on media hegemony. Practically, it demonstrates how mainstream media legitimizes specific policy paths while constraining alternatives, thereby reinforcing Western geopolitical dominance. These insights highlight the political power of media framing in shaping global understandings of crisis and governance.

Keywords: CNN, EU Energy Crisis, Media Framing, Media Hegemony



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INTRODUCTION

The growing global interconnectedness and volatility have positioned energy as not only a key issue of national security but also a vital geopolitical asset that defines power relations in the international system. The European Union (EU), alongside other major global actors, continues to face formidable pressures as it adapts to a rapidly evolving energy sector. This transformation is driven by dual imperatives: the global shift toward sustainable energy sources in response to climate change and the strategic necessity of ensuring greater energy independence and security (Ismiyatun & Cintia, 2022; Kalyuzhnova et al., 2022). Historically reliant on external energy supplies—chiefly from Russia—the EU's vulnerability has been exposed in several crises, most notably the 2006 and 2009 gas disputes, which highlighted both the risks of overdependence and the leverage Moscow wielded over European energy politics (Bosse & Schmidt-Felzmann, 2011).

By 2023, the EU had become one of the world's largest energy consumers, with more than 55% of its energy needs met through imports due to limited domestic [\(Rokicki et al., 2023\)](#). This structural dependency, particularly on Russian oil and gas—which accounted for over 40% of the EU's natural gas imports prior to 2022—exposed member states to market volatility, price shocks, and geopolitical manipulation [\(Hille, 2023; Ningrum, 2015\)](#). The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 dramatically escalated this vulnerability, triggering sweeping sanctions on Russian exports and forcing the EU to accelerate its transition away from fossil fuel dependency [\(Kang, 2022; Massaguni et al., 2022\)](#). In direct response, the European Commission launched the REPowerEU initiative, a comprehensive reform program aimed at diversifying supply sources, scaling up renewable energy production, and enhancing efficiency to build a more secure, sustainable, and resilient energy system [\(Dinu, 2023\)](#).

At the heart of REPowerEU lies the principle of diversification, reducing the risks associated with overreliance on a single external supplier. This involves forging new international partnerships, expanding liquefied natural gas (LNG) infrastructure, and investing in alternative sources such as wind, solar, and hydrogen. These measures not only advance the EU's climate neutrality commitments but also serve to strengthen its strategic autonomy and energy sovereignty, particularly amid rising debates on the ethical necessity of minimizing dependence on authoritarian regimes [\(Sassi, 2025; Taydaş, 2024\)](#). Energy policy in this context is inseparable from broader geopolitical strategy, as securing access to resources and technologies has become an essential component of the EU's global positioning.

In parallel, international media plays a pivotal role in shaping how such crises and policy responses are understood by publics and policymakers. Media influence extends far beyond delivering information; it frames public discourse, legitimizes certain policy directions, and delegitimizes alternatives. Research demonstrates that media outlets act as gatekeepers by privileging specific voices and institutions, thereby influencing both the agenda-setting process and the boundaries of acceptable debate [\(Curran et al., 2022; Gupta, 2024\)](#). In the absence of transparent state communication, journalists often rely on statements from international organizations, think tanks, and political elites to construct narratives, a dynamic that situates media as a central actor in the mediatization of politics [\(Hernández-Aguado & Chilet-Rosell, 2020\)](#). This framing power not only shapes citizens' opinions and political attitudes but also directly impacts perceptions of legitimacy and policy support.

CNN, as one of the world's leading global news outlets, provides a clear case of how media does more than report—it actively constructs narratives that legitimize, reinforce, or challenge political responses [\(Ahmed et al., 2019; Carragee, 1997\)](#). The framing adopted by CNN is deeply embedded in values, ideologies, and geopolitical orientations, which can sway public opinion and consolidate or erode political support during moments of crisis [\(Mmdoh El Sherbieny, 2022; Ofori-Birikorang, 2019\)](#). Scholarship across diverse contexts has illustrated this influence. For example, South Korean media coverage of the North Korean famine reinforced government narratives rather than producing alternative framings [\(Yeager & Podoler, 2024\)](#), while studies in Europe and Asia have shown how coverage of energy transitions or nuclear risks reshaped political debate and public support [\(Dehler-Holland et al., 2021; Du & Han, 2020; Laakso et al., 2024\)](#). These cases highlight

how framing practices vary across national and international media yet consistently mediate the relationship between state actors, the public, and policy outcomes.

Within the discipline of international relations, media framing has thus become recognized as a strategic function that influences global debates on energy security, sovereignty, and sustainability ([Robinson, 2013](#)). During the recent energy crises, CNN's reporting played a critical role in constructing the global understanding of Europe's responses, framing the urgency of action, and legitimizing sweeping policy shifts ([Teneva, 2025](#)). Other studies have confirmed that mainstream media employ rhetorical devices and emotional appeals to shape attitudes toward different energy sources, often privileging elite perspectives while marginalizing dissenting voices ([Magnusson et al., 2021](#); [Mercado-Sáez et al., 2022](#); [Vikström et al., 2023](#)). Such coverage not only reflects but actively reproduces dominant narratives and ideologies, reinforcing power relations on the international stage ([Boukala, 2019](#); [Moyo, 2010](#); [Zhang, 2024](#)).

Despite extensive scholarship on the EU's energy transition, REPowerEU policy, and institutional responses, a distinct gap remains in analyzing how international media construct hegemonic narratives around these developments. Much of the existing research emphasizes macro-level theories or institutional processes ([Bocquillon, 2018](#); [Dubský & Tichý, 2024](#); [Siddi, 2018](#)), with limited attention to the discursive role of global media in framing legitimacy and dominance during crises ([Bain & Chaban, 2017](#); [Bocse, 2021](#); [Caradaica, 2024](#); [Haas, 2019](#); [McNelly & Franz, 2024](#); [MORENO REGAÑA, 2016](#)). This study seeks to address that gap by focusing specifically on CNN's coverage of the EU energy crisis from 2022 to 2025. By combining Robert N. Entman's four-element framing model with [Çoban's \(2018\)](#) seven characteristics of media hegemony, it investigates how CNN framed the EU's responses to the crisis and how these narratives contributed to reproducing or contesting hegemonic discourses in contemporary energy geopolitics.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research methodology within an interpretivist paradigm, emphasizing the analysis of CNN's textual coverage of the European Union's energy crisis and the REPowerEU initiative between 2022 and 2025. A qualitative approach is appropriate because it uncovers the social meanings, ideological constructions, and identity representations embedded in international news reporting ([Lamont, 2015](#)). Central to the research design is framing analysis, directed at CNN news articles from the selected period, to identify narrative patterns and the direction of framing in textual representation.

The analytical framework is primarily based on [Robert N. Entman's \(2015\)](#) four-element framing model, which conceptualizes how the media emphasizes certain aspects of reality to construct meaning. Entman's framework includes four dimensions: defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgments, and suggesting remedies ([Audillah & Fajrini, 2024](#)). To strengthen the critical dimension of the study, these elements are combined with [Savaş Çoban's \(2018\)](#) seven characteristics of media hegemony, which reveal how media outlets normalize dominant ideologies, align with elite interests, and marginalize alternative perspectives. Together, these

frameworks enable the study to move beyond identifying frames to analyzing their hegemonic functions in the international energy discourse.

The dataset consists of 30 CNN news articles published between February 2022 and December 2025. CNN was selected due to its global reach, English-language accessibility, and role as a leading agenda-setter in international news ([Ahmed et al., 2019](#)). The sample size of 30 articles balances depth with representativeness, allowing for systematic comparison while ensuring analytical rigor. Articles were collected using systematic internet-based searches with keywords such as “EU energy crisis,” “REPowerEU,” “Russia gas EU,” and “European energy security.” Inclusion criteria required that the article directly address the EU’s energy situation, policies, or responses to the crisis. Opinion pieces without substantive factual content and duplicate wire-based reports were excluded.

Operationalization followed a two-step process. First, each article was assigned according to Entman’s four framing dimensions, identifying how problems, causes, moral evaluations, and remedies were presented. Second, patterns were mapped against Çoban’s seven characteristics of media hegemony to determine whether CNN’s coverage reinforced dominant ideological positions.

The researcher served as the primary instrument of analysis, applying established content analysis techniques to identify recurrent themes, lexical choices, and source inclusions or exclusions. This dual framing–hegemony framework enables a critical assessment of both explicit narratives and implicit ideological mechanisms. Ultimately, the methodological design ensures a comprehensive examination of how CNN contributes to the construction of hegemonic discourses surrounding the EU energy crisis, thereby enriching broader understandings of the political power of international media in shaping global policy debates and public perception.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Framing the European Energy Crisis

In times of geopolitical disruption, the mass media plays a decisive role not only in disseminating information but also in shaping the meaning, structure, and implications of international crises. As [Robert Entman \(1993\)](#) emphasizes, framing is a deliberate process of selection and salience—media outlets “select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient,” thereby promoting specific interpretations, causal linkages, moral evaluations, and policy solutions.

This study applied Entman’s four-dimensional model—defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgments, and suggesting remedies—to 30 CNN news articles published between May 2022 and January 2025, all of which covered the European Union’s energy crisis following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

Table 1. List of CNN News Articles

No	News Title	Publication Date	Author
1	Europe plans to spend \$221 billion to ditch Russia's energy	May 18, 2022	Anna Cooban
2	Russia is about to cut off Finland's natural gas	May 20, 2022	Chris Liakos, Anna Cooban
3	Germany urges Hungary to agree to a Russian oil embargo	May 23, 2022	Anna Cooban
4	Why Russia isn't hurting even as it cuts off Europe's gas	June 1, 2022	Anna Cooban
5	The world may be careening toward a 1970s-style energy crisis – or worse	June 2, 2022	Matt Egan
6	Germany declares gas crisis as Russia cuts supplies to Europe	June 23, 2022	Nadine Schmidt, Mark Thompson
7	Europe braces for a potential gas crisis as historic heatwave boosts demand	July 18, 2022	Anna Cooban
8	Europe plans to force countries to ration gas as Russia weaponizes energy	July 20, 2022	Anna Cooban
9	US officials say 'biggest fear' has come true as Russia cuts gas supplies to Europe	July 27, 2022	Natasha Bertrand
10	Drill, baby, drill' is back in Europe as gas crisis looms	August 1, 2022	Julia Horowitz
11	European power prices shatter records as energy crisis intensifies	August 29, 2022	Julia Horowitz
12	Europe's Russian energy crisis is escalating and so are the costs	September 5, 2022	Anna Cooban
13	EU proposes \$140 billion plan to rein in soaring energy prices	September 30, 2022	Anna Cooban
14	Europe has enough energy to survive the winter. Next year might be different	October 13, 2022	Anna Cooban
15	EU produces record wind and solar energy as it shirks Russian gas	October 17, 2022	Christian Edwards
16	Mercedes CEO says Europe's gas crisis will accelerate its shift to renewables	October 18, 2022	Michelle Toh
17	Europe will still be fighting an energy crisis in 2023	December 12, 2022	Julia Horowitz
18	The world is burning more coal than ever before, new report shows	December 16, 2022	Ivana Kottasova
19	Europe's recession may not be as bad as feared	January 23, 2023	Anna Cooban
20	Europe's natural gas prices fall to 18-month low	February 17, 2023	Anna Cooban
21	European gas prices are soaring again. Full tanks should avert a new energy crisis	June 16, 2023	Anna Cooban

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No	News Title	Publication Date	Author
22	Europe has dodged Putin's gas bullet. But it's still thirsty for cheap energy	September 7, 2023	Luke McGee
23	EU agrees to tax windfall oil and gas profits amid 'insane race' to tame energy crisis	September 30, 2022	Anna Cooban
24	Europe can't bank on its brimming gas stores to keep prices in check this winter	November 2, 2023	Anna Cooban
25	'Sick man of Europe?' Germany says it just needs a coffee	January 19, 2024	Anna Cooban
26	The EU just unveiled one of the world's most ambitious climate plans. But can it deliver?	February 6, 2024	Angela Dewan
27	Europe is beating inflation. Why can't America declare victory?	April 26, 2024	Anna Cooban
28	Ukraine ends supply of Russian gas to Europe	January 1, 2025	Kosta Gak, Alex Stambaugh, and Anna Cooban
29	Europe heaps harsh sanctions on Russia, saying 'strength is the only language' Moscow understands	June 10, 2025	Ivana Kottasova, Anna Cooban, James Frater
30	Europe takes a big step toward banning Russian oil and gas as Ukraine war drags on	June 17, 2025	Anna Cooban

This analysis shows that CNN is not neutral but rather an active agent in producing strategic narratives. The crisis is framed as externally induced, especially by Russian aggression; the EU is depicted as a morally coherent and resilient actor; policy responses are constructed within the boundaries of market liberalism and technocratic expertise; and alternative perspectives—whether from social movements, marginalized communities, or non-Western states—are rendered invisible or peripheral. In short, the framing is hegemonic, operating within and reinforcing the ideological architecture of Euro-Atlantic power.

Framing Element 1: Defining the Crisis — Energy as Geopolitical Emergency

According to Entman, the first component of framing is the act of defining what the problem is. CNN consistently defined the European energy crisis as a geopolitical emergency, induced by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Terms such as "crisis," "weaponization," "emergency," "shortages," and "blackmail" recur across the coverage, producing an atmosphere of imminent disaster that demands urgent state and institutional intervention.

For example, "Europe plans to spend \$221 billion to ditch Russia's energy" (Article 1) highlights EU dependency as a structural vulnerability, while "Germany declares gas crisis as Russia cuts supplies to Europe" (Article 6) dramatizes the event as a national emergency, legitimizing extraordinary measures such as coal reactivation. "Europe braces for a potential gas crisis as

historic heatwave boosts demand” (Article 7) presents a “double crisis” of climate and conflict, amplifying the sense of urgency.

This definitional framing is not ideologically neutral. By presenting the crisis as externally induced, CNN deflects attention from EU policy failures, such as overreliance on Gazprom or delayed renewable investments. Articles like “Europe will still be fighting an energy crisis in 2023” (Article 17) sustain a narrative of long-term insecurity, embedding the crisis in the post-Ukraine international order.

From a hegemonic perspective, this framing aligns with [Çoban's \(2018\)](#) dimensions of supporting the status quo and normalizing inequality. By defining the problem as external and solvable through existing frameworks, CNN forecloses debate about structural reform and naturalizes neoliberal continuity.

Framing Element 2: Diagnosing Causes — Singular Attribution to Russian Aggression

Once a problem is defined, framing proceeds to diagnosing causes. Across the 30 articles analyzed, CNN overwhelmingly attributed the energy crisis to Russia, particularly Vladimir Putin's decision to weaponize gas flows.

“Russia is about to cut off Finland's natural gas” (Article 2) frames Russian coercion as unilateral and punitive, while “Russia isn't hurting even as it cuts off Europe's gas” (Article 4) depicts deliberate manipulation of markets. Even intra-EU tensions, such as in “Germany urges Hungary to agree to a Russian oil embargo” (Article 3), are ultimately framed as stemming from Russia's aggression.

This singular attribution erases structural complexity. Internal EU missteps (Nord Stream 2, market liberalization, delayed decarbonization) are rarely interrogated. Instead, causality is narrowed to a binary antagonism: Russia as disruptor, Europe as victim.

Such selective causality reflects Entman's concept of “frame sponsorship” and resonates with Çoban's notion of distortion unfavorable to elites: by downplaying Western complicity, CNN shields EU policymakers and corporations from accountability while preserving elite legitimacy.

Framing Element 3: Making Moral Judgments — The West as Virtuous, Russia as Malevolent

Entman's third element involves moral evaluation. CNN consistently constructs a moral binary between a principled EU and a coercive Russia.

Articles like “Russia is blackmailing us. Russia is using energy as a weapon” (Article 8) rely on emotionally charged rhetoric to cast the EU as resisting authoritarian manipulation. “Putin will fail in his attempt to destabilize the basic economic order” (Article 14) portrays the EU's endurance as not just strategic but ethically righteous.

Meanwhile, dissent within Europe—such as Hungary's reluctance on sanctions—is morally delegitimized, while corporations (e.g., “Mercedes CEO says Europe's gas crisis will accelerate its shift to renewables” (Article 16) are valorized as ethical contributors to green transition. Counter-hegemonic voices, like Greenpeace (Article 10), appear only marginally.

Here CNN exemplifies Çoban's dimensions of normalization of inequality and marginalization of movements. The EU's contradictions (returning to coal, locking into LNG contracts) are morally reframed as necessary sacrifices, sustaining a hegemonic narrative of Western virtue.

Framing Element 4: Suggesting Remedies — Technocratic Fixes within a Neoliberal Paradigm

The final dimension involves policy prescriptions. CNN privileges technocratic, market-oriented remedies, such as fiscal stimulus, LNG diversification, renewable investment, and rationing.

“EU proposes \$140 billion plan to rein in soaring energy prices” (Article 13) frames redistribution as stabilizing markets rather than structural reform. “Germany unveils €65 billion package to ease energy crisis pain” (Article 19) portrays fiscal expansion as compassionate, yet omits discussion of long-term inequality. Renewables are framed as elite-driven investment opportunities (“Europe's gas crisis a catalyst for renewables” - Article 16) rather than just transition projects. LNG reliance is normalized as rational realignment (“Europe's pivot to LNG is costly but necessary” (Article 26).

These solutions reinforce Çoban's support for the status quo and reinforcement of consumerism. Crisis governance is depoliticized, portrayed as technocratic inevitability rather than ideological choice.

Media Hegemony and the Politics of Crisis Framing

When combined, Entman's four framing dimensions and Çoban's seven hegemonic characteristics reveal a coherent ideological project. The crisis was defined as exogenous, attributed to a singular antagonist, moralized as a binary struggle, and resolved through neoliberal remedies. This discursive cycle reproduces hegemony by externalizing blame, valorizing elites, and foreclosing alternatives.

CNN's reporting consistently aligned with capitalist interests (corporate innovation, market stability), normalized inequality (energy poverty sidelined), supported the status quo (no public ownership, no degrowth), distorted responsibility (Western complicity absent), reinforced consumerism (return to “normal”), marginalized oppositional voices (climate justice absent), and globalized Western dominance (U.S.–EU as saviors, Russia/Global South as threats).

This study demonstrates that CNN does not simply report on crises but actively produces hegemonic discourse. By converging Entman's micro-level framing with Çoban's macro-level hegemony, the analysis shows how news coverage operates as an ideological apparatus within international relations.

By bringing Entman's micro-level theory of framing into dialogue with Çoban's macro-level hegemony framework, this analysis exposes the interdependence between discursive construction and ideological control. Framing functions as the operational layer through which hegemonic meanings are circulated, while hegemony provides the structural context that determines which frames gain legitimacy. In the case of CNN, this interrelation reveals how seemingly neutral news narratives actively sustain dominant geopolitical ideologies and constrain counter-hegemonic discourse.

Mainstream IR theories marginalize media, treating it as epiphenomenal. Yet this study, drawing on critical constructivist and neo-Gramscian approaches, positions CNN as part of a transnational historical bloc ([Cox, 1981](#)). Media frames function as "structures of meaning production," reproducing elite worldviews and legitimizing their policy choices.

The findings extend framing scholarship by demonstrating how each element of Entman's model corresponds to hegemonic mechanisms identified by Çoban. Defining the crisis externalizes responsibility; diagnosing causes distorts accountability; moral judgments normalize inequality; and remedies stabilize neoliberal continuity. This integrated approach underscores that framing is not merely communicative but constitutive of global order.

Finally, CNN's coverage illustrates how crisis discourse legitimizes exceptional measures and consolidates authority. Following Agamben's "state of exception" ([Kanwar, 2006](#)), crisis framing allowed EU elites to expand interventions—price caps, coal reactivation, LNG expansion—while presenting them as apolitical necessities.

The exclusion of civil society, Global South, and oppositional voices forecloses democratic pluralism and suppresses alternative imaginaries of energy justice, decommodification, or post-growth. In this sense, CNN's coverage not only reflects but actively normalizes elite power, demonstrating the political stakes of media framing in international crises.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that CNN's framing of the EU energy crisis was not a neutral act of journalism but a hegemonic practice embedded in global power structures. Through the selective application of Entman's four framing elements, CNN constructed narratives that consistently aligned with the interests of Western states, capitalist markets, and elite institutions. These narratives defined the crisis as an external emergency, attributed causality to a singular antagonist, legitimized elite-driven responses, and normalized neoliberal continuity under the guise of adaptation.

By integrating Çoban's media hegemony framework, the study advances beyond descriptive framing analysis to reveal the ideological function of international media during systemic disruptions. It shows that CNN's coverage operated not only as reporting but as a mechanism of global governance, shaping the discursive boundaries of legitimate debate while marginalizing alternative imaginaries.

Theoretically, this study contributes to International Relations by bridging media framing research with critical political economy perspectives, underscoring the media's role as a constitutive actor in global order. Practically, it highlights how media framing influences policy legitimacy, constrains democratic pluralism, and naturalizes elite responses in times of crisis.

Framing, therefore, must be understood not only as a communicative process but as a political act with profound implications for global governance. In an era defined by overlapping crises—climate, energy, security, democracy—media's capacity to construct, legitimize, and contain crises must be central to any serious theorization of international order. This study underscores the urgency of critical media analysis as a core dimension of both scholarship and practice in global politics.

The first author, was responsible for conceiving the research topic, developing the research framework, and leading the overall manuscript writing process. He coordinated the project, integrated all sections into a coherent draft, and oversaw revisions to ensure the final version met academic standards. The second author, contributed primarily to the conceptual and theoretical development of the study, assisting with the literature review, refining the research background, and engaging in brainstorming sessions that helped shape the research direction and framing of the arguments. The third author, supported the methodological design of the study by providing input on research strategies, approaches, and techniques to ensure methodological rigor, while also offering feedback on the methodology section to enhance clarity and validity.

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