REPORT ON THE MASTER THESIS

IEPS – International Economic and Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Title of the thesis:	China's Geopolitical Aspirations and Serbia's Role in the One Belt, One Road Initiative: Analyzed Through the Context of the Heartland Theory by Halford John Mackinder
Author of the thesis:	**Vedran Kuljanin**
Referee *(incl. titles)*:	**Mgr. Bohumil Doboš**

Remark: It is a standard at the FSV UK that the Referee's Report is at least 500 words long. In case you will assess the thesis as "non-defendable", please explain the concrete reasons for that in detail.

SUMMARY OF POINTS AWARDED (for details, see below):

CATEGORY	POINTS
Theoretical background (max. 20)	10
Contribution (max. 20)	7
Methods (max. 20)	10
Literature (max. 20)	15
Manuscript form (max. 20)	18
TOTAL POINTS *(max. 100)*	**60**
The proposed grade (A-B-C-D-E-F)	**D-E**

Comments of the referee on the thesis highlights and shortcomings (following the 5 numbered aspects of your assessment indicated below).

1) Theoretical background:
Theoretical background is rooted inside MacKidner´s theory. First, there are two formal issues – the theory is originally called Geographical Pivot of History – it would be beneficial to use the name at least in the subtitle; also Heartland is not geographically defined by the author of this thesis. Second, the author claims that the Heartland can be only entered from the Eastern Europe as the remaining boundaries are protected by the terrain. However, the theory itself works with a fact that it was originally entered from the east by Mongolians and that the flatlands in the East and West combine in a "highway" that can be used for a fast travel across the landmass. Furthermore, there is a lack of debate regarding why Russia cannot become a dominant Heartland power despite the fact that it physically controls much of its territory. Finally, not a single MacKinder´s work (even the one available in the Geopolitics Reader) is cited. Much of the theory is without references and it is unclear where the sources regarding the claims made by MacKinder are. Also, the second hypothesis operate with the term "rimland" but this term is not explained in the previous discussion.

2) Contribution:
The topic of Serbian-Chinese relations holds a large potential. Nevertheless, the work has many shortcomings. The discussion over Chinese and the EU role in Serbia would benefit from the comparison of the economic relations. While in case of China the investments are heavily stressed, in case of the EU the same debate is lacking. The only small comparison is done in Appendix B related to trade volume. Also the analytical part is rather shallow. There is no proper discussion over a connection between Chinese investments in CEE and OBOR, and institutional analysis of CEE 16+1. The same goes related to the "spillover" as the CEE 16+1 is analyzed as the main Chinese partner, but the growth of trade relations is analyzed on the European level. The overall analysis seems to be more rooted in the beliefs of the author rather than a solid data analysis and application of the selected framework.

3) Methods:
The thesis attempts to use the MacKinder´s analysis of OBOR to settle the question regarding the relation of China to Serbia. Nevertheless, the final analysis is the outcome of the overview of the Chinese economic initiatives in the CEE. The OBOR framework in this sense does not act as a central point for analysis. The proposed and stated approach thus differs from the actual analysis. It would be much more beneficial to focus on CEE 16+1 rather than OBOR. The hypotheses are not reflected upon in the conclusion.

4) Literature:
The literature list misses some important theoretical works that are related to the analysis like MacKinder´s papers or Luttwak´s geoeconomics. The amount of papers regarding the empirical part seems sufficient.

5) Manuscript form:
The formal criteria are generally met. There are only three minor issues. First, why are there two abstracts? Second, the pictures in appendixes are missing (probably technical error). Third, there are some language mistakes.

The goal of the thesis is very important. The analysis of the Chinese penetration of the CEE countries holds its high relevance. Unfortunately the analysis lacks a clearer framework and larger depth that would turn the thesis into a one with a larger potential regarding its contribution to the field.

DATE OF EVALUATION: 22. 5. 2018

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Referee Signature

The referee should give comments to the following requirements:

1) THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: *Can you recognize that the thesis was guided by some **theoretical fundamentals** relevant for this thesis topic? Were some important theoretical concepts omitted? Was the theory used in the thesis consistently incorporated with the topic and hypotheses tested?*
Strong   Average   Weak
20   10   0   points

2) CONTRIBUTION: *Evaluate if the author presents **original ideas** on the topic and aims at demonstrating **critical thinking** and ability to draw conclusions based on the knowledge of relevant theory and relevant empirical material. Is there a distinct **value added** of the thesis (relative to knowledge of a university-educated person interested in given topic)? Did the author explain **why** the observed phenomena occurred? Were the policy implications well founded?*
Strong   Average   Weak
20   10   0   points

3) METHODS: *Are the **hypotheses** for this study clearly stated, allowing their further verification and testing? Are the theoretical explanations, empirical material and **analytical tools** used in the thesis relevant to the research question being investigated, and adequate to the aspiration level of the study? Is the thesis **topic comprehensively analyzed** and does the thesis not make trivial or irrelevant detours off the main body stated in the thesis proposal? More than 10 points signal an exceptional work, **which requires your explanation "why" it is so**).*
Strong   Average   Weak
20   10   0   points

4) LITERATURE REVIEW: *The thesis demonstrates author's full understanding and **command of recent literature**. The author quotes relevant literature in a proper way and disposes with a representative bibliography. (Remark: references to Wikipedia, websites and newspaper articles are a sign of **poor research**). If they dominate you cannot give more than 8 points. References to books published by prestigious publishers and articles in renowned journals give much better impression.*
Strong   Average   Weak
20   10   0   points

5) MANUSCRIPT FORM: *The thesis is **clear and well structured**. The author uses appropriate language and style, including academic **format** for quotations, graphs and tables. The text effectively refers to graphs and tables, is easily readable and **stimulates thinking**.*
Strong   Average   Weak
20   10   0   points

Overall grading scheme at FSV UK:

TOTAL POINTS	GRADE	Czech grading
91 – 100	**A**	= excellent
81 - 90	**B**	= good
71 – 80	**C**	= satisfactory
61 - 70	**D**	= satisfactory
51 - 60	**E**	
0	**F**	= fail (not recommended for defence)