Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

Author: Elisabetta Recher

Title: The Visegrad Group: an analysis of intelligence cooperation and its challenges

Programme/year: SECINTEL / 2018

Author of Evaluation (supervisor/external assessor): Jan Ludvik

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Research question, definition of objectives	**10**	7
	Theoretical/conceptual framework	**30**	22
	Methodology, analysis, argument	**40**	25
Total		*80*	54
Minor Criteria			
	Sources	**10**	8
	Style	**5**	4
	Formal requirements	**5**	4
Total		*20*	16
TOTAL		*100*	70

Evaluation

Major criteria:

Studying intelligence is an important yet challenging task. Secrecy, which is inseparably connected with the world of intelligence, makes data collection difficult if not impossible. Most documents are secret, and practitioners are reluctant to talk to outsiders. Despite these obvious limitations, this dissertation has tried to take the ambitious road of studying intelligence cooperation. When encountering the limits of data availability, the author decided to circumvent the problem. Circumventing might be the best research strategy, but I am afraid it does not work well here and that the dissertation suffers from several problems.

First, an initial research objective is a good one, but it is soon modified into a much weaker one. The dissertation aims to show, "which factors challenge intelligence cooperation among the Visegrad countries at the group level" (p.). Soon, however, the dissertation retreats from an attempt to identify what factors challenge intelligence cooperation into an attempt to describe several factors which might possibly challenge the cooperation. Furthermore, the dissertation presents rather little about the current state of intelligence cooperation among V4 countries. The state of intelligence cooperation among V4 would be much needed in this dissertation. It is entirely possible, in fact empirically rather probable, that the current intelligence cooperation among V4 countries is adequate to the needs. The reader is then left wondering, why anyone should study what challenges intelligence cooperation among V4.

Second, it is unclear why are some factors which might hinder cooperation studied, whereas most are left unexplored. The dissertation rightly draws on intelligence studies literature, which has identified factors like different organizational cultures, divergent foreign policy interests, different regulations in intelligence handing, different ways of analyzing intelligence, competition among services, or low intelligence capabilities. But then, "due to time constraints and limits on the availability of information" (p.2), it analyzes economic cooperation, different interests, different military capabilities, and different threat perception. This is problematic. It is unclear why only four factors have been selected for analysis. Moreover, for some factors, it would be needed to specify, why and how they influence intelligence sharing. I am not convinced that being someone's sixth largest trading partner has any significant role in the decision whether to share information with him or not.

Third, the empirical parts of the dissertation are rather superficial. An informed reader cannot avoid feeling that the author's familiarity with the region is rather shallow. To illustrate, the dissertation claims that V4 countries are "located between Europe and Russia" and "work as buffer zone". Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary, however, have no borders with Russia. In fact, Budapest, Bratislava, and Prague are a thousand kilometers far from Russia's westmost parts. Even Poland only borders Russia's Kaliningrad exclave. On page 19 the dissertation claims that "the Czech Republic and Slovakia have usually shown strong pro-Russian sentiments and have often opposed

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111

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increases in defense spending". The Czech Republic has, however, increased the defense expenditures at roughly 7 percent per year since the begging of the conflict in Ukraine, which is relatively more than region's spending champion Poland did.

Minor criteria:

Structure and writing style would also benefit from some smaller changes. The literature review is extensive but covers only a limited number of sources. Even though the content of these sources is discussed extensively, it could be better related to the dissertation's objectives. Description of intelligence systems of V4 countries come in the middle of the dissertation, but it would be better situated early in the text. Citations always refer to the entire source and not to a page range, which is wrong and prevents the reader from verifying the information. Last the dissertation often repeats itself, sometimes even using the same sentences multiple times (c.f. first paragraphs at p.1 and p.12).

Overall evaluation:

I understand that the studying intelligence is important yet challenging and some imperfection vis-à-vis data collection is unavoidable. The dissertations imperfections should be evaluated in this light. However, not all shortcomings above are necessitated by the difficult data collection, and even those which are could have been better addressed.

Suggested grade:

D

Signature:

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