

CHARLES UNIVERSITY IN PRAGUE
Faculty of Social Sciences
Institute of International Studies

PROTOCOL ON DIPLOMA THESIS ASSESSMENT
(Reviewer)

Name of the student: **Akime Shagivaleeva**

Title: **EU Soft Power in the Eastern Partnership countries: the Case of Ukraine**

Reviewer: Mgr. Jan Váška, Ph.D.

1. TOPIC AND OBJECTIVE (short information on the thesis, research objective):

Akime Shagivaleeva's Master thesis analyses the soft power potential of the European Union vis-à-vis its Eastern Partnership neighbours, focussing on a single case study of Ukraine. Its time frame spans from 2009 (the launch of the EaP) until the present day. The author seeks to explore whether "the EU soft power is a relevant approach and an effective foreign policy tool to persuade the EaP for integration with the EU" (p. 4) and assess the hypothesis that "the EU soft power is a relevant approach (...)" (p. 4).

2. CONTENT (complexity, original approach, argument, structure, theoretical and methodological backing, work with sources, appropriateness of annexes etc.):

The topic and the goals of the thesis are of course perfectly relevant. Yet as discussed below, the very choice of the insufficiently operationalised central concept of soft power poses serious challenges for the researcher in order to get beyond the rather banal finding that "the EU's soft power matters" (which, despite the over-confident claim in the last paragraph on p. 75, is the actual finding of the thesis).

The structure of the dissertation is mostly logical. The introduction would certainly have profited from being split up to several shorter sections using sub-headlines. The rather lengthy Subchapter 3.3 feels as a deferred second part of the literature review though, and the contribution of subchapter 3.4 is unclear, beyond stating the obvious fact that Ukraine making any choice in its "integration dilemma" would also entail significant costs.

The general discussion of the concept of soft power is good, I especially appreciated the emphasis on its contextuality. The theorising of power may have gone further though, moving from its static conception as a power resource (potential) of the EU toward acknowledging the relational character of power, in the Dahlian tradition. This would have later on enabled the author to develop more on the power dynamics of Ukraine's integration dilemma. But the extremely wide-ranging concept of soft power (especially if one includes, as the author does, the economic incentives) cries for adequate operationalization, should it be analytically useful. And this is where I feel the author fails (to her credit, she does explicitly admit the difficulties of "measurement", as she calls it, of soft power), basically limiting herself to taxatively listing the various facet of soft power as taken over from Leonova's article.

As a result, what is left to verify is just the presence or absence of sufficient soft power on the part of the EU to attract Ukraine to signing the Association Agreement. This is a very blunt criterion, but ultimately valid, though it discounts other potential factor (internal or external) pushing in the same direction (indeed, the whole rendition of "EU soft power versus Russia's hard power", e.g. p. 69, is very simplistic).

The quality and work with sources is markedly uneven. At times, large sections of text appear to only rely on web-based materials from EU institutions and have no support in literature. What exactly does K. Waltz say about normative/ethical power of the *European Union* in his 1979 book (p. 21)?

The same section of text features in two places, pp. 9 and 19.

3. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE (quality of language, citation style, graphics, formal aspects etc.):

To the extent I can assess the quality of language, it is good. There are minor stylistic and lexical issues (perhaps automatic corrections – otherwise, that does Adomeit’s “*theologising* Russian assertive position”, p. 55. mean?) but none of them impairs the intelligibility and clarity of the argument).

However, I have some critical remarks to make about the citation style. It is inconsistent (the abbreviation “opt. cit.” is probably the author’s unhelpfully used – see f/n 1, 2, 3 etc. –invention?), Internet-based resources are not readily accessible from the references and sometimes references are missing – e.g. Nielsen, p. 9).

4. SHORT COMMENTS BY THE REVIEWER (overall impression, strengths and weaknesses, originality of ideas, achievement of the research objective etc.):

Overall, this is, despite its flaws, a perfectly defensible Master thesis. On the side of its strengths, a good general discussion of the concept of soft power and a sound coverage of EU-Ukrainian relations stand out, the main weaknesses include an uneven quality of sources and references, rather shallow operationalization of the concept of soft power and also a distinct contrast between the claimed and real contribution of the research. The presence and relevance of soft power (both as a foreign policy resource and analytical concept) has been proved. Its inner mechanics, the specifics and the actual working of its individual facets, and the interplay with other intervening factor are largely still there to uncover.

5. QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS THAT SHOULD BE ADDRESSED DURING THE DEFENCE:

How do you think an actor’s soft power in any given relationship can be analytically isolated from other factors? And based on your experience, what are the limits of soft power as an analytical prism?

Concerning the representativeness of Ukraine’s case for the entire group of EaP countries – how would you explain that the EU’s soft power has been sufficient to ensure the signature of association treaties with some, but not the others? Is it only the differential economic dependence of these countries on Russia, as you appear to suggest, or do we need to acknowledge and make stock of the “barriers” and “filters” (Leonova). If so, how?

Would you agree that beside the radiation of the EU’s soft power, the economic and political self-interest of Ukraine’s leader might have been an equally crucial factor in securing the signature of the AA?

6. (NON-)RECOMMENDATION AND SUGGESTED GRADE:

YES – C (good).

Date: 13 June 2019

Signature: