

Opponent's Review on the Master thesis "Group Radicalization in the context of Hybrid Warfare: 'Russian World' as an ideological framework for anti-Western Radicalization."

Ekaterina Ananyeva, B.A. M.A. (PhD candidate) ekaterina.ananyeva@fsv.cuni.cz

The student provided an extensive study of the much-discussed topic of Russian hybrid warfare and its dependency on the concept of the Russian world. His work with literature and illustrations to the arguments are remarkable and deserve to be noted. Moreover, the questions he asks in this research have been massively discussed in the media for quite some time and are generally missed in academia. However, there are several points of critique that I would like to raise.

On the general level, the main goal of the research is to reveal the relationship between the Russian world and radicalization. Given this, it remains unclear, how the author intended to measure the level of radicalization once the process sets off. Moreover, the relevant theoretical part is too small given its importance vis-a-vis the study. In this part, I missed the exact features of radicalization that will be used later in the paper, a link of the concept to the case study or research questions. The same refers to the part on hybrid warfare that is vital to this research. In the same theoretical part on radicalization, the author distinguishes between individual and societal radicalization, but it remains unclear why the reader needs to know the conceptual difference.

The second general comment refers to empirical data. On page 11, the author states that as primary and secondary data ("xn") he uses personal journals, governmental reports, international treaties, polls, etc. This choice of data poses a natural question of compatibility, especially between international treaties, personal journals, and governmental reports.

As the third point, there is a general empirical flaw that translates in unclarity of measurements. What is the methodological component of the research? What are the exact steps in analysis of "xn"? If it is process tracing, then is it a mental exercise only? While the author discusses the case study as a concept in detail, he does not do the same for the research method he applies in his study and, thus, the reader remains clueless afterward.

Finally, the author generalizes about the whole society without taking into consideration social stratification that might influence radicalization potential. Additionally, I would like to briefly mention too many goals of the research that the author stated at the beginning of the thesis.

Turning to more nuanced comments, I would like to list them in the form of questions that can be asked during the defense.

- The author himself states that the concept of radicalization relates to the participant and is, therefore, dependent on a willingness to radicalize. How can we measure the change? Do the polls show the change over time?
- When talking about polls, the author only mentions Levada, but does not explain what type of polls they do, nor does he write about the agency (pro- or non-governmental). What kind of polls was this (focus-groups or the whole population)?
- (p.35) How is the situation on North Caucasus is linked to authoritarianism that in its turn linked to the Russian world?
- How radicalization is linked to the figure of Stalin that is popular among the Russians according to polls?
- On page 45, the author refers to the idea of continuity of Russian statehood as a claim/element of the Russian world which is listed among others on page 40. Yet, he never explained before why the table summarizes only these elements and does not go further back in history to the Kyivan Rus, for example.
- On page 48, the author discusses the results of polls regarding people`s thoughts` of Russia being a superpower. I do not understand, why he needs to have the data for this research, as the concept of superpower was not mentioned previously.
- In the part on radicalization and the exercise of hybrid warfare, the author mentions multiple times “many Russians” joining war in Ukraine, but uses other cases such as wars in Chechnya, frozen conflicts in North Caucasus and Transnistria to compare it with. Even if we forget about conceptual incomparability of cases, some empirical comparison shall be made. How many Russians fought in all these conflicts?
- The author claims that the causality is “definite” and it is the Russian world that drives Russian volunteers to participate in the conflicts. Yet, can we still be biased about it? The author states that there are people going to war for financial reasons (p.50).
- In process-tracing and the causal mechanism diagrams (p. 53 onwards), the author describes experiments but fails to explain sufficiently how the events for radicalization instances are chosen.

Overall, I recommend a B grade.