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

Title of the thesis:	**Fortress Europe? Evaluation of Ideas for the Future of the EU**
Author of the thesis:	**Bc. Jan Putensen**
Referee *(incl. titles)*:	**Mgr. Branislav Mičko**

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

Overall, a good thesis with some deficiencies in theory and methodology. I highly recommend the author to continue the unique research into the far-right ideas on borders with a honed methodology appropriate for the research questions.

1) Theoretical background:
While the author addresses the issue of theory, it is not very well integrated with the empirical part of the thesis. Firstly, he briefly outlines some concepts relevant for the discursive analysis – such as discourse, symbol, buzzword etc. – but these are not anyhow used in the actual analytical work. Less importantly (meaning no points were deducted), it is also possible to question the choice of cited authors, as none of the nestors (e.g. Foucalt, Bigo, Copenhagen School authors) of the discursive research are included. Secondly, he deals with the theory of *teichopolitics*, where he correctly identified several key authors, yet once again failed to anyhow use the theoretical perspective for the actual research. Furthermore, he did not engage with the discursive stream (e.g. Kolossov and Scott, 2013) of research in *teichopolitics*. This would be very useful for his research question and could also potentially direct him towards some of the missing authors in the first part of his theoretical outline as well as provide a more explanation/understanding narrative instead of a more or less descriptive one.

2) Contribution:
From the perspective of contribution, the thesis has merit. However, it needs to be noted that the contribution is mostly in the area of far-right ideas about borders than in the actual clarification of the meaning of the term "Fortress Europe" as it is used in the mainstream society, or even the new right parties. This is mostly due to aforementioned issues of insufficient theory integration and issues outlined below in the methods. The author obviously put a lot of work into researching how far-right scene in Austria, Italy and Germany understands the researched term. However, the way he structured his research begs the question whether the mainstream media that uses the term so often (reportedly around 3700 times in Germany in the years 2015-2018) is indeed using it in the same way the far-right movements outline it in their programmes. This would be much better clarified if an actual discourse analysis was done, as it would show which ideas are labelled as belonging under "Fortress Europe" in the political discourse, as it was partly done in the Austrian case study.

3) Methods:
Methodology is possibly the main problem of the work. In the introduction, the author choses qualitative methods and builds research questions around them, yet not even ten pages later he informs the reader about using a quantitative analysis of the media to answer those same research questions. This is made even worse when coupled with the discursive focus of the theoretical part, as it creates a rather confusing picture of what the author is trying to do. Furthermore, the justification for this is very puzzling, as the author cites Creswell's work for his choice of qualitative method, but just a page later from the cited passage in the Creswell's book, Creswell specifically outlines "explanatory sequential mixed methods", which are exactly what the author is doing.

The problems can best be seen in the case selection done through quantitative means. The quantitative part is not necessarily an issue *per se*. It shows mainly because the author is using the discursive theories as a background, but he never justifies why a national discourse was the proper level of analysis, considering the term "Fortress Europe" is inherently "European", or why should the European Commission be the discursive authority in regards to data on irregular migration and so on and so forth. These issues are then highlighted also in the conclusions, where he discovers that far-right parties in three neighbouring European countries with history of Fascism and Nazism have more or less the same understanding of what the term is supposed to mean, which is not necessarily a surprising conclusion. It would have been enough if he went with the guide Lindelkinde (the author whose text on discursive analysis he uses as a basis for his theoretical part) offers – "use discourse analysis to study how movement 'texts' (understood broadly as press releases, communiques, websites, flyers, slogans, media statements, interviews with movement representatives, and so on) are composed and draw on existing discourses in order to communicate particular meanings, and how reception of texts is therefore co-shaped by their discursive context". Following this, he would be able to, for example, show how the term "made it" into the dictionary of the far-right and whether the anti-mainstream nature of these groups did not lead them into adopting the term as positive, just because it was created as a negative buzzword by the mainstream media/politicians/society. Or, on the other hand, to find out whether their use of the term is not caused by their far-right nature, as they re-appropriated the original Nazi term from the 1940s. The other possible way would have been to use the securitisation theory to explain how the term is used to politicise the questions of border hardening in various societies and how it leads to actual hardening of borders or changes in migration policy, which would be in-line with the already mentioned *teichopolitical* researchers concerned with discourse.

The proper use of the discursive analysis toolkit coupled with the relevant theoretical background from the *teichopolitical* authors focusing on discourse would therefore allow the author to reach much more relevant conclusions on the question of the meaning of "Fortress Europe" in the current political and media discourse. This would in turn allow the author to, for example, show how the publicised image of politicians such as Matteo Salvini calling for "Fortress Europe" actually came to be, despite the fact that neither him, nor his party ever used that term. Without this analysis, the reader is left only with vague implications as to whether and how the political symbol of "Fortress Europe", which author understands as being originally invented by the political left to discredit hard borders, has been appropriated by the new right.

4) Literature:
The author provides a rather extensive literature review on the topic of history of the term before the migration crisis and this is definitely a strong point of the thesis. Still, it is a shame that *teichopolitical* literature was not researched in the same vein, as it would possibly make the thesis a lot better.

5) Manuscript form:
The thesis is stylistically and grammatically well-written and easy to read.

Suggested questions for the defence are:
1. Your research lists Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary at the bottom of the usage of the term "Fortress Europe". These countries are known for their anti-immigration rhetoric, with three of them having a Schengen border. Why do you think they do not use this term? Is it anyhow related to their understanding of their Europeaness?
2. Why is the far-right understanding of the term "Fortress Europe" relevant for the mainstream political debate? Is it possible that their understanding of the term is formed in opposition to a dominant discourse highlighting inhumanity of hard borders?

3. You conclude saying that using "Fortress Europe" indiscriminately for criticism of any hard borders can lead parts of the electorate to sympathise with the term without knowing what far-right ideas are hiding behind it. Do you think there are only extreme right-wing ideas normally associated with the term? Using your definition of a buzzword and metaphor, is there any chance other non-extremist ideas are labelled and understood under this term even by the electorate?

I recommend the thesis for final defence. I recommend the following grade: "C".

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

CATEGORY	POINTS
Theoretical background (max. 20 points)	13
Contribution (max. 20 points)	15
Methods (max. 20 points)	12
Literature (max. 20 points)	20
Manuscript form (max. 20 points)	20
TOTAL POINTS *(max. 100 points)*	**78**
The proposed grade (A-B-C-D-E-F)	**C**

DATE OF EVALUATION: 03/09/2019

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Referee Signature

Overall grading scheme at FSV UK:

TOTAL POINTS	GRADE	Quality standard
91 – 100	**A**	= outstanding (high honour)
81 – 90	**B**	= superior (honour)
71 – 80	**C**	= good
61 – 70	**D**	= satisfactory
51 – 60	**E**	= low pass at a margin of failure
0 – 50	**F**	= failing is recommended

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? Has the author demonstrated a genuine **understanding** of the theories addressed?*
Strong   Average   Weak
20   12   < 8   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   12   < 8   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 12 points signal an exceptional work, **which requires your explanation "why" it is so**).*
Strong   Average   Weak
20   12   < 8   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**. (Remarks: 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. Any sort of **plagiarism** disqualifies the thesis from admission to defence.)*
Strong   Average   Weak
20   12   < 8   points

5) MANUSCRIPT FORM: *The thesis is **clear and well structured**. The author uses appropriate **language and style**, including the academic **format for quotations**, graphs and tables. The text effectively refers to graphs and tables, is easily readable and **stimulates thinking.** The text is free from typos and easy to comprehend.*
Strong   Average   Weak
20   12   < 8   points