

Name of the student:	Anežka Fuchsová
Title of the thesis:	Understanding the Czech Foreign Policy. The Case of the EU Sanctions against the Russian Federation
Reviewer:	Tomáš Weiss

1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD

(relevance of the research question, research objective, literature review):

The thesis analyses the Czech deliberations over the EU sanctions against Russia in 2014. It strives to explain why Czechia supported the EU decision despite strong internal opposition against sanctions in general and sanctions against Russia in particular. The thesis approaches the question from the perspective of foreign policy analysis, using constructivist lenses. The research question is relevant and has not been answered in this particular form. It connects well with the literature and with the theoretical perspective employed. The review of the debate is thorough when it comes to the debate on Czech foreign policy and Czech identity. The theoretical approach is built mostly on others' accounts of the theory, rather than on the original articles and books.

2. ANALYSIS

(methodology, argument, theoretical backing, appropriate work with sources):

The thesis is based on an impressive number of sources. I believe the best parts of it are those where the author introduces the primary sources and maps the Czech debate about themselves and about the Russian sanctions, as well as the confusion among European partners regarding the Czech position. I would highlight the section on pp. 31-32 where this confusion is clearly shown. Another very good part is the section about the Czech foreign policy identity where the historical and individual roots of Czech foreign policy are clearly traced. It should be noted, though, that *Parlamentní listy* quoted on 45 are highly problematic as a source, not being an outlet observing journalistic standards.

Where the thesis lacks, however, is the general structure and the argument. Firstly, it is confusing whether it aims to show that identity is the cause of the Czech decision to support sanctions or there are other factors (role of officials, economic reasons etc.) that helped one particular identity prevail. The thesis is highly unclear in this respect. On page 13, the author argues that "the key to the understanding lies in the Czech foreign policy identity", suggesting that identity explains the decision. The next sentence, however, states that "the dependent variable is the identity", which would suggest that it is the other factors that caused the particular identity to form/prevail. The rest of the thesis does not make it much clearer, unfortunately.

I see a second problem in the fact that the author approaches the two foreign policy identities as mutually exclusive. This leads her to the attribution of individual statements to a particular type of identity. But identity is clearly not the only factor that politicians consider when making a public statement. They must consider context, case in question, positions of partners and other issues. The fact that they use certain vocabulary that may be connected with a particular identity, does not necessarily mean that they automatically sign up to that identity. For example, PM Sobotka's commitment to the sanctions can be explained by his effort to keep Czechia in the EU mainstream, or to distinguish himself from the president. The argument through international law could have come handy and was ready-made. The analysis also fails to notice that the annexation of Crimea was a very specific case – it was an obvious breach of international law by a major European power, probably a first such case since the WW II. Even if you are pragmatic in general, there may be some limits to your pragmatism, which do not necessarily make you idealistic (if we use the language of the thesis).

Thirdly, the structure of the argument is not particularly helpful and intensifies the confusion of the reader. There seems to be very little separation of the expectations and the background from the analysis of the actual data. A case in point is the section on EU sanctions on pp. 48ff, which should clearly have been placed in the introduction because it frames the context of the Czech debate but is not part of it.

3. CONCLUSIONS

(persuasiveness, link between data and conclusions, achievement of research objectives):

Unfortunately, due to the problems mentioned above, the thesis fails to provide a persuasive answer to the research question. I believe part of the problem is in the fact that it tried to prove a causal link instead of treating the identity (or the other issues mentioned in the thesis) as one among many factors that contributed to the final decision. Had the thesis just mapped the identity as a source in the Czech deliberations, it could have achieved its goal much more persuasively. The thesis has shown that identity made an imprint on the Czech debate and decision making but failed to show the causality which was too difficult and maybe even impossible.

4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE

(appropriate language, adherence to academic standards, citation style, layout):

The thesis is written in an appropriate language and follows proper standards and citation styles. Sometimes there was no need to quote full sentences where the exact phrasing was not important and the text could have been rephrased by the author (e.g. p. 25, 28).

The layout, on the other hand, is very unfortunate. The structure of the thesis is generally not very clear and the dense body of text with headings looking the same irrespective of their level, does not help with orientation.

Most importantly, the text deserved more profound editing and proof reading. There are countless typos, mistakes and omissions that make reading difficult. It starts in the list of abbreviations with "Commons Foreign and Security Policy" (p. 4) and continues with "Therefore, to sum up, bBuilding on..." (p. 13), the extra word "dějiny" in all most titles in note 71 (p. 20), missing words, such as in "Like various other Czech politicians who were active in the 1990s, the two men originally members of the Czechoslovak dissent movement." (p. 23) and many others.

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

(strong and weak point of the dissertation, other issues)

The dissertation is very strong in mapping the Czech discourse and explaining the Czech foreign policy identity. It makes an original empirical contribution in introducing and classifying the Czech debate over the sanctions against Russia. It is much weaker in connecting the identity to the particular decision due to, in my opinion, wrongly set research objectives that are too ambitious on one hand, and confusing on the other.

Grade (A-F):	D
Date:	Signature:
19 June 2019	