

Joint Dissertation Review

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| 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: | Gjovalin Macaj |

1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD

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

The thesis seeks to explain why Czechia went along with the EU decision to put sanctions on Russia, despite openly criticising such a decision. This is an important question that highlights the role of contradictions between the rhetoric and behaviour of member states in relation to common foreign policy. The discussion of literature highlights general aspects of the puzzle, but it should have focussed on the gap between rhetoric and action of member states in European foreign policy, with Czechia as a specific example – rather than offering a general overview of Czech and European foreign policy. What is at stake here is the question of discrepancy and how states manage duplicity with their partners, how they can leverage that duplicity, and the extent to which EU member states are able to act autonomously in relation to important foreign policy questions – such as sanctions.

2. ANALYSIS

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

The section on methodology pertains mainly to the question of data collection, including the conduct of elite-interviews, but it does not offer a systematic justification and elaboration of the overall research design. The theoretical discussion and the focus on constructivist accounts is too general to offer clear guidance to the empirical analysis; it should have been tied to the question of hypocrisy and duplicity in external relations, which can be strategic or simply the result of bureaucratic politics or sheer incompetence, and how states seek to manage it, and with what effects. In this context, it is not clear how ‘idealist identity’ elucidates the dynamic of Czech alignment with its European partners.

The historical narrative is interesting, but it must have been articulated in relation to the competing visions within Czechia about relations with Russia, and the EU, thus linking their current behaviour to broader historical trends. The crux of the matter is how this discrepancy affects actual behaviour, eg how Czechia manages two competing relations with EU and Russia, especially when they conflict, and how that affects Czech policy toward both of them. How does this discrepancy affect EU policy? Does Russia get anything from the rhetoric of Czechia? What does Czechia get out of it?

That this discrepancy in the Czech approach has not affected Czechia’s position among its European partners, as discussed on p 34 is an interesting finding, but requires further exploration. Is it because EU partners are tolerant, or because Czech policy does not stray away from the EU line? Also, the fact Czechia does not breach EU sanctions, as mentioned on p 38 is a crucial element. It is these elements that should have been central to the analysis, in order to understand the significance of the discrepancy. If Czechia supports and implements EU sanctions despite its ambiguous rhetoric, what is the point of such rhetoric? What does it mean? Is it something meant for domestic consumption only or an attempt to influence foreign policy? In all this, it is not clear how “elite idealistic identity” helps in explaining the phenomenon.

3. CONCLUSIONS

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

There are elements in the thesis – especially on p 34 and p 38 - that point to potentially interesting findings, but they remain tentative and underdeveloped. Overall, the thesis demonstrates serious engagement with the main question, but it could have focused more firmly on the core elements of the puzzle.

4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE

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

The thesis is comprehensible, but it does not read as fluently as it should. There are large chunks in the thesis that do not relate clearly and directly to the question at hand, and it is at times repetitive. The internal coherence of paragraphs, sections and the entire thesis could vastly be improved. It could also have helped to have the thesis read by a native speaker.

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

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

The thesis contains substantive elaborations of core components, especially as regards the internal dynamics within Czechia and the legacy of Czech foreign policy, relations with Russia and the EU before and after EU sanctions. But the structure of the coherence of the thesis could have been much stronger, the narrative more fluent and cogent and much more focused on the core elements of the question.

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| Grade (A-F): | 6.8 |
| Date: | Signature: |
| 4 July 2019 | Gjovalin Macaj |