Haylee Behrends Belarus and Interdependence: The Influence of Dependence on International Interaction

Compared to the previous version, the author made significantly broadened the volume of literature used for the thesis, which I appreciate. The list of references is now more representative, with important works included in it. Moreover, Haylee added deeper argumentation supporting her claims, although this is not without reservations. Nevertheless, the dark side is that these sources remained largely unused. Regretfully, because better use of the literature could make the progress of the work more obvious.

I find the problem already in the introduction, which does not explain the main mission or the structure of the thesis. Careful attention to this part could have prevented the confusion of the reader when reading the thesis. The author deals extensively with the topic of dependency and independence, which is logical, because much of the statements made by Belarusian representatives are about this topic. However, the understanding of the term “multivectoralism” was left unexplained. The “literature review” is more theoretical background for the work, while the review itself is, not very logically, included in the body of the thesis (pages 20-26). Further chapters also lack much of their internal structure. It is not always clear from the first sight, what is the purpose of the information, what it gives to the main topic. Although the reader gradually understands their mission, clearer statement at the beginning would be helpful. The subchapter on investment climate may serve as a proof of this problem – through reading it, we may understand that improvement in the investment climate may help Belarus to avoid full dependence on Russia, but it is not stated anywhere. Furthermore, the author repeats the fact that Belarus is an important transit country for Russian oil and gas several times.

Haylee Behrends uses some quite vague terms in her writing: “some of the highest benefits from the state in the world” (page 18) is a clear overstatement, as pensions in Belarus are among the highest in the post-Soviet world but not in the World. The thesis would also deserve more attention in editing, such as: “Belarusians fears privatization in Belarus when looking at the crony capitalism that occurred in Russia” (page 16) or “reveals that picture pained of Belarus by the West and sometimes Russia does not always accurately depict the situation in Belarus.” (page 21)

Some claims are left without referencing them: “Lukashenko finds himself caught between the West and Russia, receiving massive criticism from Western intuitions, while dealing with a high degree of dependence on Russia, something that keeps and has kept Belarusian in the Russian orbit ever since Lukashenko became president.” It is not a matter of true or false statement, but one can only guess the source of it. Also the sentence “The majority of support in Belarus goes to Russia. There is not as much support for the West as the West only funds NGOs and the opposition of Lukashenko” (page 27) is too general without referencing it. Furthermore These priorities are based on a number of historical, economic, political and cultural factors”, states the official foreign policy page of Belarus. Additionally, the pages 51-53 are based on one single source.

Despite my criticism, I must say that Haylee Behrends made some progress with her thesis. I especially appreciate the broadened base of literature and exclusion of the parts about “Belarusian identity”. Nevertheless, still, some work would be needed to reach a higher level, and therefore, my evaluation is good.

Karel Svoboda