

Name of the student:	Lucas Fagliano
Title of the thesis:	Finding the European Union's Grand Strategy: Understanding the Commission's role in formulating grand strategy
Reviewer:	Prof. Abel Escribà-Folch

## 1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD

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

Lucas' thesis examines whether the EU has a grand strategy and does so by first discussing the concept, then, the characteristics of the EU as an international actor, and then by analysing the discourse in the EU Commission documents during the Juncker's presidency. The introduction does a decent job at presenting the research question and presenting the main contributions of the thesis. The literature review seems to be much comprehensive and the author engages the literature on the concept of grand strategy and discusses it critically and in depth. He shows a profound knowledge of the state of the art and both past and recent contributions to the field. However, the discussion around the concept is repetitive at times, and at others it is confusing and too long. The core of the review should have been directed at critically analysing the existing approaches at the concept more directly and elaborating on the chosen definition sooner, as it only appears many pages into the paper and remains a bit obscure in my opinion. This weakens the arguments in the end as it tends to look like ad hoc decisions concerning the position adopted regarding the concept, without much theoretical back-up or discussion, are being made in order to come up with a definition that can be applied to the case at stake. This results in the work (and the hypothesis presented) having a confirmatory tone or approach, rather than a true exploratory and analytical one. This becomes all the more relevant because of the nature of the concept at stake: grand strategy. I think Lucas' discussion is quite confusing, very long, seems to be going in circles, and actually, in the end, it shows that it is a very contested or disputed concept, which he does not fully clarify. Ascertaining whether the EU has something that is disputed and not fully clear-cut might be problematic. Plus, his definition only comes half way into the paper, which gives the impression that the concept can be stretched or adapted to fit almost any situation, so that the question to the original question was almost predetermined.

Before answering the question of whether the EU has a grand strategy, Lucas tackles a bit, but not sufficiently, the question of whether it can have one given the nature of the EU and the role of the Commission in particular. The potential conflicting roles of the Council and the Commission need some more careful discussion; and the whole discussion of why the Commission and the EU have a prominent role in definition a goal and strategy is closed quite quickly, despite being a central theoretical aspect of the thesis, and already anticipates the answer, leaving the rest of the analysis as less relevant.

To sum up, I think too many pages are spend discussing in a blurry way the concept of grand strategy, which comes at the cost of not paying enough attention to why knowing if the EU has one or not is relevant, how this advances our knowledge and allows for further research, and to develop more in detail a theoretical model linking the idea of grand strategy, its components and the specificities of the EU.

## 2. ANALYSIS

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

The author tries to be systematic in laying down a clear theory backing his hypotheses. He is critical, reflective and diligent in addressing the several aspects the research question entails as well as the controversies regarding the role of the EU. I think the author addresses most of the points but not always the in the full depth that they require, as I mentioned above. This section needed more space definitively. The discussion of whether IOs can engage in grand strategy is interesting but needed more elaboration, especially when one considers the EU to be a especial case of a supranational institution, but not entirely an IO. The neo-institutionalist approach of international organizations and

functionalist institutionalism used to sustain the point of grand strategy being present in IOs remain underdeveloped, yet they appear to be central to the thesis theoretical contribution. Again, the lengthy conceptual discussion took too much space needed for the key theoretical claims.

There is some degree of confusion regarding the specific approach adopted in the thesis. Discourse analysis seems to be the main methodological approach, and, in my view, appropriate and extremely relevant. Yet, in section 3.4, the approach of securitization comes up out of the blue as the chosen specific approach. It might be my lack of expertise talking here, but if the securitization studies deal with security aspects and their framing, I'm unsure about the usefulness of the approach if the author considers, and discusses at length, that grand strategy may go beyond national security concerns. Hence, the advantages of this particular approach remain a bit unclear to me, a concern that increases after reading the analysis and seeing that the application is not clear there. Besides, at some point, the author also mentions the use of process-tracing, but almost only in passing. How these three approaches are reconciled and executed is doubtful, and the analysis section, despite careful and very enlightening is a bit shallow. Process-tracing is not mentioned again, and I'm unsure it is applied properly.

Further, the use of interviews would have been extremely useful to shed light on the articulation and definition of strategies and priorities. The documents analyzed are likely not to contain all the information required, despite the careful and thorough examination. In there, the author is a bit speculative in the contextual factors driving the definition of the key two strategies. The discussion there is quite shallow and I consider to be central to understand how the EU Commission came to consider the two grand strategies a priority in terms of goal and policy, which is crucial to understand how they are framed as a grand strategy or not.

There is not enough justification of case selection: the period and the Juncker's Commission despite the author anticipates that at some point, but it was never fully developed.

I commend the author for his transparency and intellectual honesty in discussing and acknowledging the limitations of the methods and approach adopted. This is rarely encountered in social science research but is extremely necessary and relevant.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

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

The conclusions are clear and nicely written (especially as compared to some other sections of the thesis). A bit more is needed to stress the contribution being made and how the thesis advances our knowledge of the field, especially, more is needed in the implications that the findings have both for further research and for policy-making.

The author is clear and transparent about the limitations of his study.

### 4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE

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

The style is overall correct which made for a rather easy read, yet the English needs some editing: some sentences are a bit confusing, there are many grammatical errors, and many parts are repetitive. the citation format is not consistent throughout the paper, in some cases just the author name is mentioned, in others author+year (without parenthesis). The bibliography is not consistent either and homogeneous in style. Attention to detail is essential in a professional academic work.

### 5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

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

The author has undoubtedly put a lot of effort in being diligent, consistent and careful in discussing and analysing the research question. The thesis has many qualities and is insightful and well-executed. I commend the author and his supervisor for the careful development of conceptual discussion, an ambitious attempt at theoretical innovation, and analytical rigour.

This is, in sum, a strong thesis.

The weakest points are the unbalance in section development, which came at the cost of some theoretical parts remaining underdeveloped. The same is true for the analysis, which came a bit short.

<b>Grade (A-F):</b>	8.1 (Leiden)
Date:	Signature:

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classification scheme

Percentile	Prague		Krakow		Leiden		Barcelona	
	Range	%	Score	%	Range	%	Range	%
A (91-100)	91-100 %	8,5%	5	6,7%	8,5-10	5,3%	9-10	5,5 %
B (81-90)	81-90 %	16,3%	4,5	11,7%	7,5-8,4	16,4%	8-8,9	11,0 %
C (71-80)	71-80 %	16,3%	4	20%	6,5-7,4	36,2%	7-7,9	18,4 %
D (61-70)	61-70 %	24%	3,5	28,3%			6-6,9	35,2 %
E (51-60)	51-60 %	34,9%	3	33,4 %	6-6,4	42,1 %	5-5,9	30,1 %

**Assessment criteria:**

Excellent (A): 'Outstanding performance with only minor errors';

Very good (B): 'Above the average standard but with some errors';

Good (C): 'Generally sound work but with a number of notable errors';

Satisfactory (D): 'Fair but with significant shortcomings';

Sufficient (E): 'Performance meets the minimum criteria';

Fail: 'Some/considerable more work required before the credit can be awarded'.