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| Name of the student: | Kseniia Petrantsova |
| Title of the thesis: | EU's Action for Gender Equality in its Foreign Policy: Normative Gender Power? |
| Reviewer: | Maxine David |

1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD

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

The student makes an excellent case for a gap in the literature and for the necessity of closing it. Surprisingly little has been written in relation to gender in Russia and even less about this area in the EU-Russia relationship. Equally, as argued, there is a good case for more work on the EU as a gender equality entrepreneur. In the context of rising authoritarianism, crackdowns on the public space and the dire state of EU-Russia and West-Russia relations, the research question is undeniably relevant. The student identifies and relies on a good body of literature. Grounded in feminist IR theory and work on the EU as a normative power, the thesis is well-supported conceptually and theoretically and the student demonstrates understanding of that literature. That said, there are limits to what I can credit as being understood because the review is very far from comprehensive and certain ideas needed unpacking and some elaboration. I am not sure, for instance, whether the student has a good understanding of the typologies of feminist IR theory or of the historiography of feminist thought. The starting paragraph conflates a very wide body of thought, much of it at odds with each other. Ultimately, critical feminist thought is relied on but the entire canon is described as if it is all critical. Most relevant was for there to be a good understanding of gender mainstreaming and what this entails in foreign policy terms - this was not set out. There was a lot of reference to mainstreaming in the literature review but little or no *understanding* of it delivered. The same can be said of the discussion of NPE: the student tells us on p.8 that she will apply NPE but then in the next breath directs us to two sources for a "detailed analysis of the concept". Given its application here, I expect to see that detailed analysis performed by the student, what follows is insufficient - why, for instance, the focus on transference and overt diffusion but not the other modes?

Other absences from the literature review become clearer once the reader is into the thesis. The empirical work ends up being on very reliant on an understanding of civil society initiatives and the advantages and disadvantages of external funding and other support but none of that is considered here. This inevitably compromises the later analysis. The same is true of EU-Russia relations more generally where foundations are not laid sufficiently early for the reader to understand why the EU might not do some of the things the literature the student relies on seemingly says it should.

2. ANALYSIS

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

There are some problems in relation to the fit between the research question and what the student says about the case study. The question itself *is* the case and so no conclusions can be drawn as to more generalisability: if the student really wanted to draw conclusions about "the EU's foreign policy and its role of [sic] a normative gender power" (p. 10), the research question should have been about precisely this latter aspect versus being as it is, i.e. "*To what extent has the European Union acted as a normative gender power in Russia?*". This is a basic methodological issue that I would not expect to see in a final thesis. The paragraph on process tracing is brief in the extreme, we get more lines on the selection of documents as source material! The discussion moves on to how the documents were analysed but the connection between this and the process tracing previously talked about is completely opaque and we are given no insight into why the categories selected are chosen. It is also entirely unclear how the methods to be applied relate to the literature review, generating an early feeling of a lack of coherence. That feeling is later supported by a complete(?) failure to reference the methods employed in the empirical work.

The empirical chapters deal with good, relevant material, painting a picture of the EU's (lack of) support for gender equality promotion in Russia in the post-soviet years and of the obstacles that started to arise in the first decade of the new century. I would have liked to see more evidence of

engagement with primary sources, on p. 15, for instance, before the start of the section/chapter, some primary source evidence could have been usefully deployed. The student is completely right to argue for a lack of targeted work by the EU on this but it would have been good too to see the possible reasons for that interrogated too. Finally, there is a small but important body of literature that argues that foreign assistance can be detrimental to the emergence of a grassroots, therefore homegrown, civil society focused on gender equality (as well as other issues). Thus, again, some deeper engagement with the criticisms made of the EU in the literature was warranted. Finally, here, the student has not connected all aspects of the work, the comment on p. 20 about “the European views on governance ...” without thinking about what that third basket of Helsinki was about, nor about the collapse of the USSR and all that was said then about Russia and liberal democracy. It is important not to fall into the trap of the more propagandistic statements made by political actors and here the student does not interrogate Russian political elite claims that the EU and the West seeks to impose their ideas on Russia.

The second empirical chapter is stronger in terms of original research and illuminating the work of the EU. Indeed, this is the place where we really see what the thesis could have been. The good work there, however, is undermined by all the promises made earlier. We get little of the promised process tracing, with the causal mechanisms insufficiently clear. There is a little, indirectly, on correlation but that is all (e.g. pp. 16-17). I would also have liked to see a more obvious operationalisation of those two modes of transference and overt diffusion - which are never mentioned. Equally, some explanation of what more could have been done in terms of gender mainstreaming was necessary. Finally, here, I expected to see more insight into the EU as an actor and the way Brussels sees itself as one part of a multilateral architecture that leans heavily on its member states and other organisations, although it is true that we get some mention of the Council of Europe and other actors.

3. CONCLUSIONS

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

The thesis had a lot of potential to produce good, persuasive conclusions that not only answered the research question and sub-questions but illuminated the EU-Russia relationship further and which explicated the obstacles facing the EU when trying to achieve certain objectives. We end up with a description-rich thesis that answers the RQ but which missed opportunities to provide deeper, relevant insights. See the bottom of p. 26, for instance, where we are left wondering why on earth this was not explored in much more detail above. Given the claim to reliance on Manners’s work and the earlier claim to make a contribution by looking at the EU as a gender equality entrepreneur in relation to a non-member state or non-ENP member, this is a real shame because Russia perhaps represents a good opportunity to show the limits of Manners’s work and the modes by which the EU can be a norm entrepreneur.

4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE

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

The thesis is largely well-written with meaning clear, the tone is appropriately academic. There are some minor writing errors, some harder for the student, as a non-native speaker of English, to pick up, others that should have been picked up in a good proofreading exercise, e.g. p. 7: “exiting” instead of “existing”; p. 8 “sparkling” instead of “sparking” (presumably); p. 8 “Chappel” instead of “Chappell”.

The thesis suffers from a failure to indicate the structure sufficiently well in visual terms and often in terms of transitions and signposts too, see, for instance, p. 11 where we move from data and methods to the empirical analysis with nothing to indicate this is happening except what looks like a sub-heading versus a chapter heading. I have no idea why clear chapters were not employed nor a table of contents given but it makes for a read that seems more stream of consciousness than properly structured and that structure clearly delineated for the reader.

As already suggested, the presentation could have been better, there is an abstract but no table of contents, for instance. Chapters are not numbered and are not set out on new pages. As the culmination of two years of study, I do expect the thesis to be presented in a properly serious fashion.

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

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

11,448 words seems short for a thesis worth so many credits. I assume that also includes the bibliography, which means the thesis itself is far below that word count, accounting for just 26 pages of the total of 40, the bibliography therefore constituting more than one third the length of the thesis. Perhaps this would not have mattered had we still been given a comprehensive and deep analysis of what is undeniably an important research question. The potential of the thesis is not met because of a failure to spend sufficient time and words on exploring key aspects of the thesis. Much more also had to be done in terms of the student turning their capacity to deliver critical analysis on her own work, see, for example, the problems with the methods chapter (if chapter it was). This is a real shame since the thesis began in convincing form but then suffered from some significant deficiencies, with the other highlight only coming in the final empirical chapter.

In short, a potentially excellent thesis that very unfortunately falls far short of that potential.

Grade: 7.2 (Leiden) - C (Prague)

8 July 2020 Maxine David