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Final Report on the Doctoral Dissertation “Russia as a Rising Power in Multilateral Institutions” by Ekaterina Ananyeva

In her dissertation Ekaterina Ananyeva explores the attitude of the Russian Federation towards multilateral institutions. She formulates her central research questions concisely by asking, “which attitude does Russia hold towards M[ultilateral] I[nstitution]s and what explains the choice of patterns of deviations?” To investigate, she draws on archival materials recently made available by Russia’s foreign ministry, and analyses them quantitatively using sentiment analysis software. She complements this with three case studies of the OSCE, SCO, and WTO, where she interprets the findings of her quantitative analysis in the context of a specific multilateral institution over a period of several years. Her main hypothesis is that Russia’s attitude towards a multilateral institution will be shaped by its degree of institutional influence (she speaks of stronger and weaker positions within an institution). This is consistent with her major empirical observation, which is that Russia made statements supportive of Western-led institutions when it was seeking membership within them, but became passive or neutral/negative after becoming a member. Because the Russian attitude can be explained satisfactorily as a function of institutional privilege, Ananyeva affirms the utility of rational functionalism.

In my initial report dated 6 June 2020, I identified strengths and weaknesses of the dissertation and raised several issues in need of attention in revising the dissertation for the final submission. In this final report, I will focus only on how Ananyeva has addressed these issues.

One issue that needed addressing were the lack of clear and consistent definitions of core concepts such as multilateral institutions, rising powers, and the distinction between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ issues. This relates directly to the question of whether it is appropriate to classify Russia

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as a rising power, as Ananyeva asserts. On multilateralism, the discussion appears to have been extended, but it is notable that there is still no clear statement about which definition underpins the thesis in the section on multilateral institutions (1.1.2.), or how this was then operationalized and coded. It is good that the discussion of the concept of rising powers (1.2.1) has been extended, and broadened to include a larger range of theoretical traditions. The definition provided on page 28 is at least explicit even though it could be open to a wide range of interpretations. Ananyeva argues that Russia constitutes a 'special case' of a rising power due to its history as a previous world superpower (p. 33). Not all of this section is convincing. The operationalization of the criteria for rising power status remain only implicit. One problem is trying to categorize Russia as a rising power in all multilateral institutions, without differentiating between them. To speak of Russian 'soft power' in the Ukraine crisis (p. 34) also raises many questions. More fundamentally, it would be helpful to have a clear reason why, for the purposes of this dissertation, Russia needs to be classified as a rising power at all.

On the issue of 'hard' and 'soft' issues, Ananyeva refers to political psychology (pp. 48), but it remains unclear what theoretical status this distinction deserves. I still found this explanation unclear. Moreover, it seems to be equated with issues that are either in or beyond "core national interests" (p. 81). But issues like human rights, the environment or judicial matters (p.81) hardly seem unimportant to rising powers or any other states. As this distinction only serves as a control variable in the analysis (p.81) this is not of utmost importance, however.

I was however happy to see that the coding procedure for identifying multilateral institutions of which Russia is a member is explained now explicitly on pages 52-54, and the full list of included institutions is included, although the exclusion of some institutions from the UN and World Bank families because their goals overlap with other institutions seems arbitrary. I also had trouble with Ananyeva's choice to exclude from the analysis all institutions that the Russian government did not issue statements about (p.54). Does it not say something about Russia's sentiment towards an institution if it does not deem it worthwhile to comment publicly on? Given that a core finding of this dissertation is that Russia often adopts a neutral or uninterested position, as reflected in the sentiment analysis of public statements, this finding seems quite relevant, and not something to simply discard from the analysis.

A second issue concerned the problem that the key explanatory variable—referred to by Ananyeva as 'institutional position', 'control over decision-making processes', and 'position of dominance'—was not directly tested in the analysis. The operationalization of this variable is critical, because it is the key hypothesis that the dissertation seeks to explore. Hypothesis one (p. 49) reads that "When Russia holds a strong position in a multilateral institution established after the end of the Cold War, it leads to the country's support for the IO." It is not clear why the end of the Cold War should constitute a scope condition for the argument. Moreover, such a scope condition is not reflected in

Hypothesis two (p.49), which is the obverse of H1 in arguing “When Russia holds a weak position in a multilateral institution, this leads to its challenger position within the IO.” It is therefore irritating that this core explanatory variable is equated with Russia’s membership status as either a founding member or a joining member (e.g. p. 51). This needs to be more clearly justified. Numerous institutions operate on a sovereign equality principle regardless of whether a state is a joiner or a creator, so speaking of being in an institutionally ‘strong’ position by virtue of having been a founding member is not immediately convincing. Norway was a founding member of the United Nations, while Germany and Japan were not, but it does not necessarily follow that Norway has a stronger position than Germany or Japan. Although the distinction between joining or creating does appear to be quite significant (pp. 93–95), it is not unambiguously clear that this vindicates the first hypothesis. The validity and necessity of this proxy should have been more adequately defended.

Another issue is the role of alternative explanations. A major weakness of the first version of the dissertation was that it neglected alternative theories and potential rival explanations of Russia’s attitude. I am glad to see some discussion of constructivism and realism in the revised draft (sections 1.1.4 and 1.1.5). But I am also disappointed that these discussions do not result in any observable implications that may be tested or to feed into the rest of the dissertation. Given the discussion of defensive realism, it would have been useful to contrast the expectations of defensive realism against that of ‘rational functionalism’, which Ananyeva takes as her core hypothesis. Would not both theories have similar observable implications? It is also not fully clear that the discussion of the Principal-Agent framework (pp.40–43) is relevant to all multilateral institutions, because not all have an autonomous body or ‘agent’ to which responsibilities can be delegated (the Arctic Council, at least until 2013, would be one example).

Fourthly, I flagged the lack of engagement with theoretical literature on status and emotions, despite Ananyeva’s core topic being the ‘sentiment’ of Russia statements concerning multilateral institutions. This issue has been taken up in the revised dissertation, and connections are discussed on page 69.

Fifth, and perhaps most fundamentally from an empirical point of view, is how revealing the results of the sentiment analysis really are, in light of the relatively small level of variation, and with ‘neutral’ statements constituting the majority of results. Ananyeva has addressed this point by emphasizing the diplomatic nature of the language that she is analysing, and provided a bit more evidence on the distribution of positive, neutral, and negative sentiments over time. The distinction between hard and soft issues seems to have some bearing on the results, as the clearer discussion on pages 90–91 illustrate. Moreover, there does appear to be some significance of the factors that Ananyeva tests for, most notably the membership status (joiner or establisher). Ananyeva’s argument seems convincing on this point.

In my original report I also mentioned that more could be done to emphasize the important contributions of the dissertation to existing theoretical literature in International Relations. Unfortunately, I do not see much that has been done in this direction. The discussion in the conclusion on pages 163-164 is very brief and does not really highlight the significance of the dissertation's *results*. This is regrettable as it undermines the significance of the data analysis that constitutes the core of the dissertation.

Finally, there is the issue of practical execution of the dissertation. On the whole the dissertation is very clearly presented and logically structured. At the same time, the language used in the dissertation can at times act as a barrier to comprehension, and some of the discussion of existing literature could be more exactly referenced (for example, the discussion of Abbot and Snidal's 1998 article on page 20, and the work of Martha Finnemore on page 22, does not provide any page numbers even though they would be appropriate in several instances).

On the whole, in this revised version of the dissertation, I see an honest attempt to address the reviewers' concerns and some major improvements to the dissertation. At the same time, not all of the revisions are fully convincing. Nonetheless, this should not distract from the fact that Ananyeva has written a dissertation on an important and under-studied topic. She has used a novel and systematic empirical approach to generate and evaluate a lot of new data, and provided plausible interpretations of the findings in relation to existing literature. For these reasons, I recommend this dissertation be accepted.

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