

Name of the student:	Nikoloz Khachidze
Title of the thesis:	Analyzing Coherence in EU's Foreign Policy Towards Russia. Case: EU's Relations towards Russia in 2014-2020
Reviewer:	Robert Kissack

1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD

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

The thesis seeks to explore why EU MS have very heterogeneous positions towards Russia in their national foreign policies, but that EU-level sanctions, despite mounting evidence suggesting that they have been continually declining in effectiveness, remain in place. The puzzle is framed in terms of horizontal and vertical coherence, and to what extent the absence of vertical coherence is an impediment to horizontal coherence. The paper builds on a number of studies (Nuttall, Gerhard, Koenig in the field of coherence, Portela's work in relation to EU sanctions), and inverts the more usual structure by making horizontal coherence the dependent variable – that which is to be explained. The explanatory variables favoured by LI – not least rational expectations about gains from cooperation, is seen as the most convincing explanation for why EU MS do not veto EU sanctioning efforts.

2. ANALYSIS

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

The author acknowledges the limitations that one would expect with research into the inner-working of European Council negotiations over EU sanctions with Russia. Secondary literature, and some analysis based on assumptions and findings from other work is used. The use of data to demonstrate economic benefits from trade with Russia does help to strengthen the argument promoted; but at times there are claims that are unsubstantiated but taken as important steps in the development of the argument – for example, 'private companies do not make such decisions without at least unofficial approval from their government' (p.32 -although no page numbers are included) regarding firms relocating their production. Overall, while not wishing to suggest that insufficient work has gone into the paper, *other* dissertations do set the standard for demonstrating what is possible.

3. CONCLUSIONS

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

A lot of the paper is spent setting up the framework (discussion of sanctions, discussion of cohesion, etc.) and while the comparison of the two time periods is logical, the paper seeks more to 'prove' LI is the best explanation, than demonstrate conclusively that the competing answers, that would be drawn from other theories, are clearly insufficient. Those other theoretical frameworks are not very elaborately developed to the point of being 'strawmen'. Finally, the inversion of coherence as DV (not IV) could have been more frequently elaborated on in the paper throughout, as a guiding structure.

4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE

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

The text appears to have been very hurriedly completed – there are sections of text where definitive articles ('the') is missing from the text, while there are other places where it is correctly used. There are a number of obvious incorrect words (possibly auto-correction of typos) that all (a) diminish the impression of quality and (b) could have been avoided with a comprehensive proof-read.

Moreover, the text is not as concise or well-organised as other dissertations submitted – that is to say that to expect a higher level of overall 'finish' is not unreasonable. By comparison to others, this work cannot stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the best, unfortunately.

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

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

The paper has certainly identified an important issue to explore; how the EU deals with Russia has always been, and will continue to be, a litmus test for its global ambition, its ability to bear economic costs of foreign policy goals, and the degree of cohesion possible when Russia's preferred approach is to work with MS bilaterally. The thesis could have been more focused in its assessment – the work notes that it does not look in detail at the security issues of destabilising democracy and disinformation campaigns, or the covert operations (such as poisonings) in EU MS territory.

The overall impression is that the paper would benefit from more time in development and writing.

Grade (A-F)	E / 5.3
Date	Signature
26/06/2021	R. Kissack