Name of the student:	Nikolozi Khachidze
Title of the thesis:	Analysing Coherence in the EU's Foreign Policy towards Russia
Reviewer:	Dr Maxine David

1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD
(relevance of the research question, research objective, literature review):

The student asks how horizontal coherence was generated in the EU's foreign policy towards Russia in 2014-20. Good justification is made for asking the research question (RQ), a justification grounded in both contemporary events in EU-Russia relations and a relevant body of literature. The student delivers a literature review that notwithstanding some problems is very relevant to the RQ and he shows good understanding of that literature. This is by far the strongest part of the thesis. The problems referred to above relate to the quality of the writing, the need for the student to specify his positioning and to talk to the matter of later applicability. The latter two are important elements of a literature review and could have been much more obviously on display. The strengths of the literature review are further undermined by a failure to connect it comprehensively to the rest of the thesis. Coherence is in place, as are sanctions but what from the literature review leads the student to a comparative theoretical framework?

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

The thesis is very weak in relation to method. A case study approach is not problematic per se but if the EU-Russia relationship is the case study then the study should not be a part of the RQ. The theoretical framework covers too much ground in terms of theories, which results in a concerning lack of depth in respect of each of them and makes it near-impossible to operationalise all of them in the eventual analysis. I can surmise for myself why we are told institutional coherence will not be applied (though that is not entirely the case) but it is not the job of the reader to make the connections and it then becomes difficult to credit the student with having seen that connection. Ultimately, although much of that chapter looks as if the student is saying it delivers information necessary for thinking about and working out the research design, it is not fully thought through and no framework emerges. There are also very problematic aspects to that discussion, e.g. that socialisation did not play a role in the internal coherence of the Commission and EP in Szep's interviews, concluding this is a finding that rules out the applicability of socialisation elsewhere. Relatedly, the method relies on already mediated findings, i.e. on secondary source literature. There is no evidence of engagement with the surveys cited, just a very problematic reference to the conclusions of those scholars who used them. The reference to the impossibility of conducting interviews is a distraction. There are plenty of other methods available, including using the plentiful number of documents and records of speeches, debates etc that are easily accessible. Thinking about such alternatives would also have helped the student see how difficult it is to incorporate 27/8 states into a single analysis, especially given the word constraints.

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

There is no conclusion to speak of in the thesis. The chapter on findings does deliver some analysis but the relevance of that analysis to the research question is not always clear or the argument is not sufficiently extended to demonstrate relevance. For example, in respect of the effect of sanctions on Russia, it seems the student is arguing that a focus on this assists in understanding the mindset of the EU (then) 28 in renewing the sanctions but that aspect is not pursued, especially in terms of helping the reader understand why more or less effect on Russia mattered. That failure renders the section entirely unhelpful. There are also missed opportunities to connect different parts of the thesis to show how they work to build to the bigger argument, for instance, on the 2014-16 section, what is the connection to the earlier explanation of sanctions? Is Doxey particularly relevant? In section 2019-20, horizontal coherence is asserted but not argued, we gain no sense of *how* horizontal coherence was generated (the RQ), nor do we even know how it was identified – purely in the rolling over of sanctions? Ultimately, because of the tendency to marginalise or obscure the research question and then not to return to it in the conclusion, the research objectives are not achieved.

4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE
(appropriate language, adherence to academic standards, citation style, layout):

The structure of the thesis leaves much to be desired, we come to research design and case selection very late; findings are delivered before analysis; and the concluding chapter (presumably) consists of just 7 lines. Within chapters, there are occasional problems too. I do not understand, for instance, why the Lerch and Schwellnus paragraph comes where it does in the literature review. Signalling and transitions are not used nearly enough, which contributes to a less than fluid read.

The thesis is unfortunately further heavily undermined by a failure to undertake proofreading or editing exercises to any effective degree. Overall, it reads like a draft versus a final version. More time needed to be spent on a pure editing exercise to ensure the necessary level of coherence (no irony intended) across the thesis was achieved. Just focusing more on and invoking the research question should have helped the student see that it is not always obvious why the theoretical framework is set out as it is, whether a focus on sanctions alone would be sufficiently revealing, why the section on effects on Russia (and other sections) moved the student closer to an answer to the question and certainly the conclusion needed to return to the precise question asked.

In terms of proofreading, there is an awful lot that could have been picked up in a dedicated exercise. There is a good deal of inconsistency in the use of definite and indefinite articles, nouns are sometimes used instead of verbs, e.g. analysis instead of analyses; nouns that are not proper nouns are treated as such, e.g. Policies instead of policies; failure to transcribe quotes accurately, e.g "makes a actors look"; or avoiding repetitions, e.g. the setting out (unnecessarily both times) of Thaler's book title.

Overall presentation is unhelpful in terms of there being no table of contents, no chapter numbering and no attempt to differentiate between title and sub-title – e.g. is the section on international sanctions a new chapter or a section within the literature review? The formatting suggests it is but then I would argue for this being another example of poor structure. It should be noted also that it would be far easier to give directed feedback if the student had taken the time to number the pages.

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT
(strong and weak point of the dissertation, other issues)

The thesis had a good deal of potential but much more time needed to be taken to ensure it could move from potential to achievement of it. In addition, more thought needed to be given to method. There is a contribution to be made but the evidence of (in)coherence could not be derived from looking at one policy response and then generalised to all of EU-Russia relations, let alone to the EU's CFSP more widely. Additionally, in respect of method, original research needs to be conducted given the student's ambitions to contribute to both the coherence and EU-Russia bodies of literature. It is possible to rely on secondary source literature only but then I would expect to see a thesis directed at theory-testing and the RQ here does not suggest that is the purpose.

Grade : 4.5 – F (Fail)

After extensive conversations with the first reader, I agree a final grade of F - 4.9, which allows the student the opportunity to retrieve a better grade at the defence and therefore a pass overall.

27 June 2021