

Name of the student:	Thomas Baker
Title of the thesis:	The EU in the eyes of the Australian elite 2016-2019: perceptions in the context of Brexit
Reviewer:	Tomáš Weiss

### **1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD**

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

The thesis is embedded in the literature on perceptions of the EU from abroad and in image theory. It makes the case for the need to study the potential shifts in the Australian perception of the EU after Brexit well, although it is not very specific about how such shifts can be studied and measured. There is not much about the comparability of the individual research outputs reviewed. As a result, the original perceptions with which the post-Brexit perceptions should be compared are defined very broadly in dichotomic categories, such as is the EU considered a power or not. In such a situation, only major perception shifts can be identified – from power to not a power, not shifts in intensity – from a power to a stronger power. This is, however, a more general observation of the research on perceptions and the current thesis fits into this literature well. The relevant academic debate is well-defined and reviewed. The research objective is clear, with the limitations mentioned above.

### **2. ANALYSIS**

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

The thesis makes the best out of what was available to the author, given his research at a distance and limitations due to the pandemic. The identification of the relevant data is clearly explained and the argument for the focus on think tanks, instead of policy makers, is very thorough and persuasive. The inductive selection of topics, delimited by the existing literature makes sense. The argument is well-structured and clear. The work with sources is appropriate, the interviews make the results more interesting adding more depth to the often brief information from the written sources.

### **3. CONCLUSIONS**

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

The conclusions are relatively short and reflect the fact that it is quite difficult to make a very strong argument based on the data available. The thesis does achieve research objectives but in a manner that does not bring any stark revelations. Generally, there are mixed views of the EU in Australia after Brexit and while the perceptions may be changing over time, it is because of many factors, not just Brexit. This, in itself, can be considered the most interesting finding – Brexit is not considered as strong a factor among the Australian elites as it may seem from English-language media.

### **4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE**

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

The language is appropriate; the fact that the author is a native speaker helps obviously. Better editing would have helped, however. Occasionally, there are spare or missing words (e.g., “states in the Indo-Pacific states” on p. 10). The word “straightforward” is spelled in two different manners in a single sentence (pp. 17-18). Academic standards are observed, the citation style and layout are without any problems.

### **5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT**

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

Thomas Baker has written a solid thesis, which entertains an interesting and topical issue. The strong point of the research is its connection to the growing body of the perception literature and the relevant question it asks. The weak point is the relatively blurred result, which does not point in any particular direction, and which partially reflects the nature of the perception research in general. During the oral defence, the following questions could be discussed:

- What does the result of the thesis say about the role of the EU in the world and the EU's foreign policy?
- How do you interpret the fact that a substantial part of the materials analysed in the thesis was written by non-Australian authors? Does it suggest anything about the salience of the issues in the Australian debate or the reception the ideas may receive among the Australian policymakers?

<b>Grade (A-F):</b>	C
<b>Date:</b>	<b>Signature:</b>
26/08/2021	