

Name of the student:	Salome Abuselidze
Title of the thesis:	LOST CHILDREN OF EUROPE: EUROPEAN UNION AND UNACCOMPANIED MIGRANT CHILDREN
Reviewer:	Vera Scepanovic

1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD

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

The thesis addresses an issue that is of great social importance and certainly deserving of additional investigation: the situation of unaccompanied minors crossing the EU borders and the ways in which the EU's own policies shape the difficult situation in which they find themselves.

The research objective is, however, not very clear, or rather, the question does not really match the research strategy. The thesis offers to investigate 'Why the EU struggles to adopt common policies on unaccompanied migrant children' and 'How the EU contributes to their disappearance'. However, the theoretical framework already offers an answer to the first question: the EU struggles to adopt common policies because it's member states' politics are mired in cultural backlash and social construction of migration as 'bad', and that in turn prevents common policy-making. From there, the thesis is simply an exercise in hypothesis-confirming, cherry-picking evidence that shows that there is indeed rising xenophobia across the EU and that some (CEE) member states indeed obstruct common policy-making on migration.

This setup leads to some serious problems in the analytical strategy. There may well be a good argument for why there needs to be a common, binding policy at the EU level. However, in a research project one would need to first explain which policies there are, why they are not effective, why a single policy would work (and what kind) and what potential pathways exist to attaining such a common policy. Instead, the literature review is a very long and broad-ranging survey of all literature on the topic of unaccompanied minors that only occasionally highlights policy failures, and even more rarely links them to the EU itself. For instance, with regard to claims that UAMs have no political rights, such as the most important 'right to participation', or that MS don't implement international obligations in practice, it is not clear why exactly it is the EU that should do something, and what this something could conceivably be. The policies that the EU does have are dismissed as cheap talk, including the rulings of the ECJ, and are more importantly not systematically surveyed. This is a missed opportunity because to explain why the EU policy initiatives fail it would be important to focus on what was attempted in order to demonstrate how exactly the independent variable (rise of populist parties) affected the result.

2. ANALYSIS

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

The thesis covers a broad variety of sources and brings together a large amount of evidence to support its claim. However, the analytical strategy is for the most part inappropriate to the research question, and is overall applied in a fairly unsystematic manner. In order to explain why the common EU policy failed, the author would need to a) define what constitutes common policy, bearing in mind the complexity of the EU institutional landscape and the different channels of policy-making and b) show that decision-making was obstructed by the rise of right-wing populist parties and their (specific) construction of UAMs. The first part is not done at all – the author looks into one instance of policy-making (migration quotas) in which the common policy has in fact been made, disregards others where common policies were also made (Frontex, Turkey deal), and vaguely mentions, without examining the others (case law of ECJ, action plans and reforms of the Dublin regulation). The second part is done to the extent that the author does document the rise of anti-immigrant sentiments and right-wing populist parties in various EU countries, but (except for the CEE opposition to the refugee quotas) these are not directly connected to the specific instances of policy making, and, more importantly, they are not connected to the specific issue of UAMs.

This is very troubling, because the thesis' theoretical framework is grounded in constructivism, arguing that the policy design depends on the social construction of target populations. However, even though it is acknowledged throughout the thesis that the social construction of migrant children is likely to be ambiguous and fluid, the thesis takes their position as fixed ('dependent deviants') and does not actually empirically examine this construction. The only time this is done is by referring to secondary research on the UK. Own examination of the Euronews sources does not reflect on the direction of this construction, nor does it attempt to explain which audience the Euronews is supposed to be influencing. For all these reasons, even though the larger background trend is fairly well documented, the specific policy outcomes remained unexplained – for instance, no attempt is made to clarify the link between policy changes in 2016 in Austria (introduction of integration counselling and modified rules on family reunification) with the right-populist outlook of its government, let alone how this relates to any EU-level developments (e.g. EU family reunification directive).

3. CONCLUSIONS

For the reasons explained above - weak embedding of the thesis in the debates on the EU migration policy and weak link between the presumed independent variable (social construction of UAMs and right wing populism) and the policy outcome – the conclusions come across as much weaker than they should be.

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

4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE

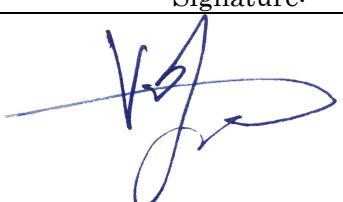
(appropriate language, adherence to academic standards, citation style, layout):

The thesis is generally written in good academic English, and is clearly laid out. The referencing apparatus is adequate, though there are many strong claims throughout the thesis that would have benefited from additional support.

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

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

The thesis tackles an important topic and offers many insights into different aspects of policy-making relevant to unaccompanied minors. The overall argument, however, would have benefited from a tighter focus and better alignment between the research question, theory, and research strategy.

Grade (A-F):	E (6,2)
Date:	Signature:
07/09/2021	

classification scheme

Percentile	Prague		Krakow		Leiden		Barcelona	
	91-100 %	8,5%	5	6,7%	8,5-10	5,3%	9-10	5,5 %
A (91-100)	91-100 %	8,5%	5	6,7%	8,5-10	5,3%	9-10	5,5 %
B (81-90)	81-90 %	16,3%	4,5	11,7%	7,5-8,4	16,4%	8-8,9	11,0 %
C (71-80)	71-80 %	16,3%	4	20%	6,5-7,4	36,2%	7-7,9	18,4 %
D (61-70)	61-70 %	24%	3,5	28,3%			6-6,9	35,2 %
E (51-60)	51-60 %	34,9%	3	33,4 %	6-6,4	42,1 %	5-5,9	30,1 %

Assessment criteria:

Excellent (A): 'Outstanding performance with only minor errors';

Very good (B): 'Above the average standard but with some errors';

Good (C): 'Generally sound work but with a number of notable errors';

Satisfactory (D): 'Fair but with significant shortcomings';

Sufficient (E): 'Performance meets the minimum criteria';

Fail: 'Some/considerable more work required before the credit can be awarded'.