

## IMSISS Dissertation Feedback & Mark Sheet

<b>Student Matriculation No.</b>	<b>Glasgow 2486500Z DCU 20109385 Charles 685718 Trento</b>
<b>Dissertation Title</b>	Russian Foreign Policy Identity and the War in Ukraine

### INDIVIDUAL INSTITUTION GRADING

<b>Reviewer 1 Initial Grade</b> B2 [16]	<b>Reviewer 2 Initial Grade</b> B2 [16]	<b>Late Submission Penalty</b> no penalty
<b>Word Count Penalty</b> (1-15% over/under = 1gr point; 15-20% over/under = 2 gr points; 20-25% over/under = 3 gr points; more than 25% over/under = 0 fail)		
<b>Word Count:</b> 21960 <b>Suggested Penalty:</b> no penalty		

### JOINT GRADING (subject to agreement of the external examiner and approval at Joint Exam Board)

**Final Agreed Mark.** (Following correspondence reviewers should list the agreed final internal grade taking before and after any penalties to be applied).

**Before Penalty:** B2 [16]      **After Penalty:** B2 [16]

### DISSERTATION FEEDBACK

<b>Assessment Criteria</b>	<b>Rating</b>
<b>A. Structure and Development of Answer</b>	
This refers to your organisational skills and ability to construct an argument in a coherent and original manner	
• <i>Originality of topic</i>	Very Good
• <i>Coherent set of research questions and/or hypothesis identified</i>	Excellent
• <i>Appropriate methodology and evidence of effective organisation of work</i>	Very Good
• <i>Logically structured argument and flow of ideas reflecting research questions</i>	Very Good
• <i>Application of theory and/or concepts</i>	Very Good
<b>B. Use of Source Material</b>	
This refers to your skills to select and use relevant information and data in a correct manner	
• <i>Evidence of reading and review of published literature</i>	Excellent
• <i>Selection of relevant primary and/or secondary evidence to support argument</i>	Very Good
• <i>Critical analysis and evaluation of evidence</i>	Very Good
• <i>Accuracy of factual data</i>	Excellent
<b>C. Academic Style</b>	
This refers to your ability to write in a formal academic manner	
• <i>Appropriate formal and clear writing style</i>	Good

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• <i>Accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation</i>	Very Good
• <i>Consistent and accurate referencing (including complete bibliography)</i>	Excellent
• <i>Is the dissertation free from plagiarism?</i>	Yes
• <i>Evidence of ethics approval included (if required based on methodology)</i>	Not required
• <i>Appropriate word count</i>	Yes

### ADDITIONAL WRITTEN COMMENTS

#### **Reviewer 1**

The dissertation asks about the Russian foreign policy identity and its manifestation in the discourse connected with the war in Ukraine. The research is strong in several regards. Its design is clear and well-introduced by the research questions. The theoretical as well as empirical literature is surveyed well. The empirical analysis of the elite discourse in which the Russian foreign policy identity manifests itself is convincing. There are, however, also several shortcomings. The major one is the lack of focus on the actual identity, both in the constructivist literature as well in the empirical literature dealing with the Russian foreign policy. Despite finding long-term patterns in the Russian foreign policy, the treatment of identity is insufficient, as the dissertation does not fully appreciate the dynamics and intrinsic dimensions of the concept. Compared to the discussion on the Russian strategy, the missing analysis of identity as a fluid concept would be more compatible with the proposed research design. Despite these issues, the dissertation represents solid research on a highly relevant topic. It needs to be noted that the author was able to compensate for the lack of empirical sources originally considered for the analysis.

#### **Reviewer 2**

This was an incredibly detailed study that brought in an impressive range of literatures. It was clear that you had an advanced knowledge of various literatures, including on Russian foreign policy, discourse analysis, Russia's imperial history, and constructivism. This is reflected in the extensive bibliography.

While I like a lot in this dissertation, I did see some areas that could have been improved. In some places, I found that you introduced sweeping assertions without fully backing them up. One way that this manifested itself was in your frequent, but imprecise, use reference to 'Russia' as a seemingly human and homogenous actor. For example, you state: "Therefore, currently, Russia does not aim at limiting itself to serving just a Russian nation because it wants to influence and be a so-called protector beyond its borders". Here you just need to be more careful in how you phrase this. At the very least you can refer to Russian policy makers/Putin/Russia's ruling elites etc. instead of 'Russia'.

Additionally, this sort of sentence needs substantiation. What is your evidence for making this sweeping statement? I am not saying the statement is incorrect; instead, I just wanted you to tighten up how you write, and to provide clearer justifications for your assertions. There were a number of examples where I felt that your phrasing was too sweeping.

In the literature reviews, I was impressed by the breadth of your knowledge. However, I would have preferred the section on constructivism to have gone before the section on Russia's imperial past, grand strategy, othering etc. The reason is that you could have nicely incorporated your insights into constructivism into the discussion of these issues. This would have provided a clear way to engage with

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the literatures you discuss and to see how constructivist themes are prevalent in terms of othering, imperialism, Ukraine etc.

This is why I thought chapter two was very good, but I was less enamoured with chapter one. For me chapter one lacked focus on your research questions. Why, for example, did we need to have a large section on Russian grand strategy? This needed to be contextualised a little more in light of your constructivism approach I felt. If the important lens is identity, then why focus on strategy so much? Additionally, I thought it was a shame not to focus more clearly on the literature that has examined Russian identity more generally. This would have helped identify key themes that are applicable to foreign policy analysis. Indeed, many of these themes emerged in your study. Therefore, a clearer engagement with these literatures would have been useful.

I thought the discourse analysis approach was promising. It was also clear that you had a good understanding of the key principles that underpin discourse analysis from a theoretical and conceptual perspective. At the same time, I thought more attention could have been paid to discourse analysis as method. You did not spend time explaining how to operationalise the conceptual insights you so intelligently discussed. I felt that this was a shame, and it also led to a somewhat superficial level of analysis of the texts. The texts in question though were selected with care and I was satisfied that you provided clear justification for your text selection methods.

The actual analysis of the texts though resembled thematic analysis more than real discourse analysis. You were able to examine some of the emerging themes. You were also able to describe the contours of these themes nicely. However, this analysis lacked depth I felt. There are many discourse analysis approaches, and a better focus on them would have, I believe, yielded stronger results. I wanted a more detailed analysis of the language used, of the ways that themes were being connected, and how images were being (re)produced. The subtitle of this section was 'thematic discourse analysis' but little reference was made to the concept of the 'thematic'. So a little more work could have been done here.

The lack of real discourse analysis was evident in chapters five and six. You make a series of intelligent points in these chapters, but most of your conclusions do not draw directly on the evidence from your texts. There was, moreover, very little reference to the texts, which I felt was strange. It therefore felt like you were making general conclusions (which were perfectly valid in their own right), but which you had derived from your general understanding of Russian foreign policy, rather than through a process of discourse analysis.

Overall though, while I had some concerns about the structure of the dissertation, I did find many things I liked here. In many places, you were able to discuss complex issues with sophistication and intelligence. You had a clear grasp of many important literatures and concepts. I also largely agreed with your analysis. However, I felt that the research design could have been improved. Ultimately, I wonder what we have learnt here that is new. These themes are already widely explored in the literature on Russian foreign policy and will come as no surprise to anyone who follows Russia seriously, let alone scholars of Russia. To sum up, this was all very smart, but you could have tightened it up in various ways.