

IMESS dissertation						
Name:	Donna Boniface					
Dissertation title:	Making moments of history: how the comparison between the 1953 uprising and the 1989 revolution is contributing to a new German story.					
Scale: 5 - excellent, 4 - good, 3 - satisfactory, 2 - poor, 1 – very poor						
	5	4	3	2	1	
ARGUMENT:						
Clearly defined research question		4				No clearly defined research question
Answers research question				2		Does not answer research question
Well structured			3			Badly structured
Shows theoretical awareness		4				Shows no theoretical awareness
Conceptual clarity				2		Conceptual confusion
Empirically appropriate & robust			3			Full of empirical errors
Logical and coherent			3			Illogical and incoherent
Analytical		4				Descriptive
Critical		4				Uncritical
Shows independent thought		4				Does not show independent thought
SOURCES & USAGE:						
Evidence of reading/research		4				No evidence of reading/research
Effective use of sources/data				2		Ineffective use of sources/data
WRITING STYLE:						
Clear		4				Obscure
Good punctuation		4				Poor punctuation
Grammatically correct	5					Grammatically incorrect
PRESENTATION:						
Appropriate length	5					Too long/short
Good referencing				2		Poor/inconsistent referencing
Good spelling	5					Poor spelling
Good bibliography			3			Poor bibliography

Comments:

Donna Boniface formulates her major research question already in the title of her thesis. Later she writes that her “essay will consider how the 1953 uprising has been used by politicians and academics to rehabilitate the 1989 revolution and build national identity and assess why linking these two events is so vital for the building of a new identity for reunified Germany.” (p. 1) The author then provides a long and fairly sophisticated methodological introduction, but the core of her M.A. dissertation lies rather in a comparison of the 1953 uprising (the author rightly reminds that although it exploded and was suppressed by the Soviet tanks in June, another wave of protests ensued a month later) with the protest movement of 1989 that eventually led to the dismantling of the communist regime and to the fall of the Berlin Wall. As such, the comparison is well done and convincingly structured as the author compares: 1) the respective attitudes and actions of West Germany and its Western allies towards the 1953 and 1989 events, 2) the Soviet positions in both cases, 3) the situation within the Eastern bloc, 4) the impact of economics, 5) the participation of the people, with the specific roles played by the church. She thus draws interesting parallels (points 1 and 2), but also soberly contends that the comparison between 1953 and 1989 is *ein unmöglicher Vergleich* in the case of the people and their hopes and aims (p. 78). Yet, for some reason or another, Donna Boniface does not tell us much about the impact of the comparison on “a new German story” as suggested by the title of her thesis.

The text also suffers from an absence of a proper analysis of sources and literature. Furthermore, sometimes it is not quite clear what sources the author’s account is based on, due to the absence of necessary footnotes (pp. 35-36 and elsewhere). For instance, it would be interesting to know from where the author drew the following conclusion: “Before 1953 Soviet consensus appears to have been moving towards complete withdrawal from Germany.” (p. 54) Recent analyses by Peter Ruggenthaler, based on thorough research conducted in the relevant Soviet archives, show clearly that the Stalin note of 1952 was a big bluff aimed primarily at the prospective disintegration of the Western bloc (see above all his *Stalins grosser Bluff: die Geschichte der Stalin-Note in Dokumenten der sowjetischen Führung*, München, R. Oldenbourg 2007). I am similarly sceptical about the author’s explanation of the 1956 Hungarian uprising as a “movement from within the party seeking to reform against the wishes of the Soviet Union.” Books by numerous authors have confirmed that it was much more than that – while, at the same time, the ideas presented at the 20th congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union had an undeniable influence upon the thinking of the Hungarian communists.

I appreciate Donna Boniface’s consistent effort to dispel various myths connected especially with the 1953 events. Such is the case of her emphasis upon the violent nature of the uprising, which is rarely reminded in the current discourse (p. 69). The author also used and indeed explored the crucial documentary edition on the international history of 1989, by Svetlana Savranskaya, Thomas Blanton and Vladislav Zubok, published only last year (*Masterpieces of History. The Peaceful End of the Cold War in Europe, 1989*, Budapest – New York, CEU Press 2010) as well as several important syntheses, including the one by Melvyn Leffler (*For the Soul of Mankind. The United States, the Soviet Union and the Cold War*, New York, Hill and Wang 2007). However, since a lot of space is devoted to the Soviet decision-making process, perhaps the only available concise synthesis of the Soviet foreign policy in the Cold War, based on research in Soviet archives, by Vladislav Zubok should have also been used (*A Failed Empire. The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*, Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press 2007). And even more surprising is the absence of the highly relevant and widely discussed book on the German question in 1989-1990 by Mary Sarotte (*1989. The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press 2009).

To sum up: Donna Boniface submitted a text that is well argued and concise in most of its parts, but incomplete and not entirely convincing when assessed as a whole. The same ambivalent assessment applies to her selection and use of relevant sources.

Specific Questions for oral defence:

1. How is the comparison between the 1953 uprising and the 1989 revolution contributing to 'a new German story' in a) political debates and journalism, b) teaching and textbooks, c) historiography?

Deducted for late submission:	Deducted for faulty referencing:	Mark* : 2/B (65)
Charles marker: Vít Smetana	Signed:	Date: June 19, 2011

***Mark: A = 70+; B = 65-69; C = 60-64; D = 55-59; E = 50-54; F = fail, less than 50, see Scheme of award –please, fill in this way: Charles/IMESS (e.g. Výborně/A)**

Scheme of award (assessment criteria):

	Charles University**	IMESS
Excellent	Výborně [1]	A
Very Good	Velmi dobře [2]	B
Good	Velmi dobře [2.5]	C
Satisfactory	Dobře [3]	D
Sufficient	Dobře [3.5]	E
Fail	Neprospěl [4]	F