

## Joint Dissertation Review

Name of the student:	Jordan Luber
Title of the thesis:	EU Foreign Policy Toward Venezuela, 2017-2018: A Study on the Potential Development of Human Rights in EU Foreign Policy
Reviewer:	Tomáš Weiss

### 1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD

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

The thesis describes the reaction of the main EU institutions to the developments in Venezuela in 2010s with a particular emphasis on the years 2017-2019. It argues that the EU's reaction in 2019 was atypical and bears some relevance to broader role of the EU in the world and in promoting democracy and human rights in particular. The research question is extremely descriptive. It merely aims to describe EU's policy but does not have the ambition to analyse it further or to explain it. In fact, the author claims that these objectives would be beyond the scope of the thesis and its possibilities. I dare to disagree – I would rather expect a Master's thesis to look for explanations, albeit very limited ones within a clearly defined theoretical scope. This deficiency is closely related to the issue of literature to which the thesis may speak. While there is a whole chapter on literature review in the thesis, it is not completely clear how the review informs the research question or the method of inquiry.

### 2. ANALYSIS

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

The method is not transparent. Key concepts are poorly defined – there is very little on EU foreign policy, what it is and how it can be studied. The whole thesis revolves around the statement that EU's policy towards Venezuela was somehow “atypical” but there is no definition of a “typical” EU policy that could be compared to the case. The anecdotal examples of EU policy towards various regions and actors in the world cannot substitute a structural approach and analysis.

Overall, the thesis pays attention to official declarations of EU institutions. There are methodological and theoretical limitations to this approach, though. Firstly, the thesis fails to explain why it deals with those and only those “institutions”. The analysis of EU's approach might be a bit broader – the EU delegation in Caracas or MSs' embassies could have played an important role in delivering messages to both the government and the opposition in Venezuela. Alternative channels of communication could be used – cultural, sports, scientific, economic. There is no distinction between the various EU institutions but there is a major difference between a resolution by the European Parliament and a decision by the Commission or by the Council in terms of impact on EU-Venezuela relations. Furthermore, it is highly unclear how exactly the EU documents are analysed.

Many of them are reviewed, but there is no clear system in what the author was looking for and which criteria guided his analysis. As a result, there are various statements about the alleged EU policy, but most of the time, there is little evidence to back these claims as there is no system that would provide such evidence.

The thesis draws from a remarkable number of sources. There are full 50 pages of sources. Many of them are highly relevant, although many are just newspaper articles. There is no extensive debate on sources. Generally, as the aim of the thesis is to describe the development on the ground and the positions of EU institutions, the sources are just accepted as sources of reliable information.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

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

As already suggested above, the thesis does achieve its objective and describes EU policies towards Venezuela in the period 2017-2019. It fails to provide a structured analysis of the EU policies and does very little beyond showing that EU's policy towards Venezuela changed in 2018-2019. It does not explain why it changed, it does not persuasively argue that the change was anyhow atypical, particularly given the development on the ground and the changing context.

The link between data and the conclusions is mostly problematic. There is no clear analytical approach that would provide such a link in the first place. But the data itself is often a compilation of unrelated (or very tangentially related) anecdotes of EU foreign policy.

### 4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE

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

The language is appropriate and the thesis does adhere to academic standards well. The layout and the citation style are without major problems.

### 5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

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

Jordan Luber's thesis focuses on a highly relevant and interesting topic – the EU's role in the world, its adherence to the basic values and its impact in geographically distant regions. The strong point of the dissertation is the thick description of the developments surrounding the crisis in Venezuela and the EU's official positions on the issue. The weak point of the dissertation is the lack of analysis and distinct vagueness in terms of the basic concepts used throughout the work.

### 6. QUESTIONS FOR THE THESIS DEFENCE

(1-3 questions that could be asked during the thesis defence)

How do you explain different approaches by the European Parliament, the Commission and the Council to the situation in Venezuela? What do they say about the issue at hand and the character of the institutions?

What policies have been involved in EU's reaction to the developments in Venezuela and how do they determine EU's actorness in the region?

To what extent has the EU's reaction been actor-dependent or context-dependent?

Grade (A-F):	E
Date:	Signature:
30/06/2020	