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Programme details

Programme: European Politics and Society

Specialisation:

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Thesis details:

Title: Perception of the Representatives of the French Political Establishment about the Strategic Potential of Poland in 2015-2021 based on Journalistic Discourse in non-French-Language Sources

Is the thesis in your assessment free of plagiarism?

Yes to my knowledge the thesis is free of plagiarism

Yes, none detected in reading and Turnitin did not suggest any issues.

Can the thesis be made publicly available in the Leiden University Repository?

by M.E.L. David: it can be made public through the repository.

Summary assessment/comments

The thesis has a lot of potential but much more needed to be done to explain the relevance of the primary source material and also to make clear it was primary source material. This is also an example of a thesis that would have benefited from a good deal more ruthlessness when it came to the editing process. Losing unnecessary words would have made the thesis more readable but also would have given the student more space to deliver a deeper analysis of French perceptions.

Criteria

Knowledge and insight

The thesis focuses on French perceptions of Poland and its strategic potential in the period from 2015-21. The main research question (RQ) is supplemented by two sub-questions, relating to the role of ideology and of changing geopolitical circumstances in influencing French perceptions. The student works hard to contextualise the thesis, establish the gap in the literature and therefore the contribution to make. Writing rather gets in the way of the student being able to express this entirely convincingly but it is the case that this is a focus that warrants attention and about which there is plenty still to be said. The thesis is grounded in some good, relevant literature but bearing in mind what I say below about the quality of the English language writing, I think it was a mistake to rely on so much Polish language literature, This also makes it difficult for any reader without Polish language skills to assess the authority of some of the sources. We get quite a thick description of the literature on perceptions, although more could have been done to categorise this into debates in the literature to make the work less descriptive, to evaluate whether all strands in those debates were covered but also to ensure a tightness and clarity of ideas that is not in place at the moment. At other points in the literature review, the necessity of the discussion is not entirely clear, e.g. p. 11 where considerable cuts could have been made since the relevance is not obvious. At the same time, certain things are missing, e.g. there is a small body of literature on Old vs New Europe that would have been very useful to see covered in the literature review, connecting as it does the link between perceptions and the twin foci studied here. The final part of the literature review is an important one and here we do see the student trying to show us how this literature is applicable for their purposes and to build a theoretical framework. More could have been done here in analytical terms to say whether each of the components is equally significant and I would also have liked to see some counter-argument, especially as that might then have revealed for the student a major flaw in the framework: the thesis is really based on the hypothesis that Poland is not as influential as it could be because other powerful states do not recognise its strategic potential. But in the articulation of the framework, it is suggested that influence precedes perception, such that the student is now engaging in a circular argument whereby influence is one of the determinants of perception but perceptions are one of the determinants of influence.

Assessment: (more than) satisfactory

Weighing: n/a

Application knowledge and insight

The thesis would have delivered better on analysis if description or assertion had been turned more often to analysis. Chapter 4 offers a good example of a chapter where the student is more intent on conveying the knowledge acquired in the research than in operationalising the insights from the literature reviewed or even the theoretical framework. There is a fairly pervasive feel in the thesis of it not being clear why we are reading what we are. Space needed to be carved out in the literature review, for instance, to make clear the significance of certain literature for the pursuit of the research question and for the student to take a position in respect of certain discussions; section 2.2 a good case in point, chapter 4 another. Chapter 5 is better in this regard but even here the analysis could have been pushed further and deeper conclusions drawn. In methodological terms, a good case is made for content analysis and the student shows some good understanding of the method. However, as we discussed in supervision mode, a focus on media could only be useful if the sources used were those of French policymakers or if the student could demonstrate the influence of French media on policymaking. There is a section on sources and their selection but the question of relevance is not answered there. Neither of these vulnerabilities is addressed adequately for the reader, whether in the method chapter or the analysis, which rather undermines the arguments and conclusions.

Assessment: (more than) satisfactory

Weighing: n/a

Reaching conclusions

As indicated above, arguments and conclusions are weaker than they might have been because foundations contain fundamental flaws and are not built strongly enough. There are words lost to verbose writing or seemingly irrelevant issues that could have been saved for more important purposes elsewhere. The student spent a lot of time, it seems, drawing up the coding sources but they are really confined to the appendix rather than made use of in-text to help deliver the arguments and conclusions in a persuasive fashion.

Assessment: (more than) satisfactory

Weighing: n/a

Communication

The thesis suffers, unfortunately, from some major writing problems. Some sentences are very opaque and the student really needed to simplify sentence structure in order to ensure the idea to be conveyed was entirely clear, see, as just one of many possible examples, the first line of the last para on p. 4. Relatedly, the structure of the thesis really needed refining in terms of identifying what was essential material and what could be dispensed with. There is a lot that really does not serve to move the arguments on. I am not always convinced by the placing of certain material either, e.g. parts of the introduction, notably on p. 2, would have been better placed later in the thesis. There are points too where the student seems to forget what they are doing, e.g. p. 9 where we have the paragraph of summing up, which then moves into new information and then back to a concluding statement. The thesis is well-presented, referencing is performed well.

Assessment: (more than) satisfactory

Weighing: n/a

Learning skills

After what I think we would both agree was a rocky start, Mateusz ultimately engaged well with supervision. The thesis was very much the result of Mateusz's thinking and approach. Some draft chapters were delivered in sufficient time to provide detailed feedback and discuss that.

Assessment: good

Weighing: n/a

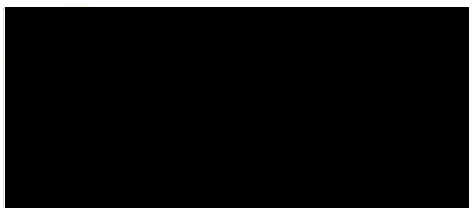
Formal requirements

These are met.

Final assessment

On 01-07-2021 this thesis is graded with a 6.5

Signatures



M.E.L. David