

Name of the student:	Alice Forsman
Title of the thesis:	The ideational leadership of the European Commission in its legislative response to the surge in irregular migration
Reviewer:	Jan Váška, Ph.D. (Prague) (supervisor)

1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD

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

The present thesis contributes to the flourishing research on political leadership in the European Union, and specifically that of the European Commission, by investigation a so far largely neglected (if not niche) aspect to it: ideational leadership, in its normative - rather than cognitive –aspects. The case under investigation is the Commission’s legislative response to the 2015-16 migration crisis, studied via tools of qualitative contents analysis of a set of 10 documents focussing on tackling irregular migration. The research question, as formulated on p. 7, steers the enquiry towards systemizing rather than critical approach. The research is duly embedded in existing literature, the scope of which is satisfactory but not exactly outstanding.

2. ANALYSIS

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

The methodological reasoning is meticulous and the strategy the author has chosen – deductive QCA – is well defended though the argument that IR theory schools of realism and liberalism are “useful for (...) study of migration legislative documents” might have been supported more compellingly. Once the analytical categories and the coding system have been established – a rather lengthy process as the author notes and the supervisor testifies – they have served the purpose reasonably well.

I have no reservations concerning the author’s work with either primary, or secondary sources.

3. CONCLUSIONS

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

The conclusions are based on available data and the objectives of the thesis, both on the empirical level and in the ambition to prove the study ideational leadership as viable research programme, have in general terms been achieved.

I would though like to invite the author to reflect on the accuracy of her interpretation of the findings in one aspect (and, ideally, prove me wrong). In the discussion, she argues to have documented a prevalence of realist oriented ideas, albeit with a strong presence of some key liberal ones. Scrutinizing the completed Analytical Tool 2 on p. 55, this is of course true to the extent that 7 out of 10 documents are localized to the bottom-left of the grey line dissecting the tool in its “realist” and “liberal” halves. And yet taking the two axes separately, it is only the y-axis where a (small) majority of documents (6:4) lean towards the “realist” pole. As for the x-axis, the proportion is the opposite (6 “liberal”-leaning documents out of 10).

4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE

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

The thesis is written in appropriate style and generally very clear language, though at some points (mostly word order) it is apparent that the author is not native English writer. In terms of referencing

and citation style, the thesis meets high academic standards with just very minor mistakes (e. g. the cited E. Meyers book is dated 2000 in the text but 2004 in the list of references).

Presentation-wise, I commend the colour-coding and all the visual support elements, tables and graphs, which significantly improve the readers' comfort and orientation in the text. Numbering of chapters and subchapters may have further contributed to the clarity of the thesis structure.

Full research data are available via a cloud-based document, which helps the interested reader reach beyond the synthesised findings and aggregate data presented in the thesis itself.

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

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

This is generally an academically sound, original and conscientious paper which links together all the necessary elements of a successful thesis – literature survey, formulation of research question, theory-based concept development, methodological reasoning, clear criteria for material selection, and a sufficiently transparent use of appropriate methods to obtain and analyse data – to arrive at new, original knowledge which I felt that, while certainly providing answer to the research question as posed, still might have been discussed and interpreted more robustly in order to offer more academic “added value” on top of the empirical results proper.

Here are a few points and questions I would like to invite the author to tackle during the defence:

What is, according to your understanding, the one most important reason (apart from the problem being intrinsically reasonably interesting) for analysing the distribution of liberal and realist-oriented ideas across the particular set of documents you studied?

Noting that you presented the Commission as a liberal actor in nature, what (and why so) were your expectations as concerns the prevalence of realist vs liberal elements its ideational leadership “input” into the refugee and migration crisis? And gauged against these expectations, did you find your results surprising?

What are the implications of your findings for our understanding of the character of the Commissions' ideational leadership (both within and beyond the migration policy domain)? What is the main contribution of your research to existing scholarship and debates? Do you see your results as rather supporting or challenging the prevailing wisdom?

Grade (A-F):	B or C, depending on the defence
Date:	Signature:
2 July 2021	Jan Váška