Joint Dissertation Review

Name of the student:	Lika Khutsiberidze
Title of the thesis:	Changing patterns in CSDP in the aftermath of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022
Reviewer:	Tomáš Weiss, Charles University

1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD
(relevance of the research question, research objective, literature review):

This thesis is not very well connected to the field. The literature review is extremely badly written. It is just a list of articles and their summary without establishing a narrative or mapping the discussion. It does not provide a sufficient idea about a debate or a gap that needs to be addressed. While the literature covered is relevant, it does not produce a puzzle. The author only claims that something has not been done so she will do it. But she fails to explain why it is an interesting and necessary thing to do to increase our understanding of the topic.

The research objectives are not defined clearly enough. It is not explained how the analysis of the discourse can explain a change in the CSDP. There is little about the causal logic underpinning the connection. There is little explanation of why France, Germany and Poland apart from an unsubstantiated claim that they have the biggest impact on the shape of the CSDP. While this may be true for France and Germany over the years, it is highly debatable in the case of Poland, in contrast to, e.g., Sweden and Finland whose impact on CSDP is widely accepted and documented in the literature.

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

The theoretical backing is not sufficiently elaborated. The brief presentation of the institutionalist theories does not discuss the theory in depth. It does not weigh its advantages and pitfalls. There is little discussion about the theoretical underpinning of the causal claims made in the thesis. The selection of discursive institutionalism is argued for in general terms only. There is little explanation of how discursive institutionalism links to policy change or the lack of. And, crucially, there is just a very vague link between the theory and the empirical analysis.

The discussion of the selection of sources is not developed sufficiently either. The main argument of the thesis why the analysis of the leading politicians' statements should be the most relevant data seems to be that it has not been done by scholars (p. 33). But maybe it's because they don't generate interesting findings? To what extent are these statements representative of the "states'" positions? Aren't they biased by the theatre and occasion of delivery? There is little discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of this type of data.

Most importantly, the thesis does not analyse the causal links, despite the causes being at the centre of the research question. What the author does is mapping the discourse (with all the caveats mentioned above) and saying that the change in discourse has caused a change in policy. But she does not identify the causal chain in any manner. Can it be that both policy and discourse have changed due to another factor (such as the Russian invasion)? Can it be that the policy changed, and the discourse changed as a result? What is the causal direction? None of that is discussed in the thesis.

When it comes to working with the data, the only tangible analysis is the frequency of the threat perceptions, which, rather unsurprisingly, shows that Russia is considered a threat more after the invasion than before. The rest of "analysis" is just a summary of author's impressions that do not seem to be a result of any structured work with the sources. There are no quotes, no references, no links to the original statements.

There are 20 pages of "contextual background" that is mostly irrelevant to the analysis, or, more precisely, is linked but could be introduced on 2-3 pages. There are also minor factual mistakes, such as mixing up millions and billions (p. 19) and missing the fact that the European Defence Agency had already been established in 2004 (p. 10).

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

The conclusions are not persuasive. The only substantive result they present is the banal information that Russia is now considered a more prominent threat than before. There is little in terms of policy change drivers and causal links. There is no discussion what the findings mean for the literature.

4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE
(appropriate language, adherence to academic standards, citation style, layout):

The language is mostly appropriate, even if sometimes rather obscure, e.g., "…existing institutionalist theories that solely overemphasised agency but neglected the role of structure and agents of agencies." (p. 35) The thesis adheres well to academic standards. The citation style and layout are without problems.

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT
(strong and weak point of the dissertation, other issues)

Overall, this is a poor thesis. It does not persuasively identify the research gap and the research question; it does not link the theoretical framework with the research puzzle or the data sufficiently. There is some original analysis, but it is rather weak. There is little discussion on what the results may mean for the broader academic debate. A large part of the thesis provides "background" information without direct link to the puzzle or the analysis.

Possible questions for the defence:

- What do your findings mean for our understanding of the CSDP evolution or the EU's reaction to the Russian invasion of Ukraine?

- What is the link between discursive institutionalism and your empirical analysis? How does the theory shape your selection and handling of data and your interpretation?

Grade (A-F):	E (3.0 in Krakow)
Date:	Signature:
19/06/2024	