

Name of the student:	Norayr MIRAKYAN
Title of the thesis:	EU Cultural Relations with Partner Countries: Case Study of Armenia
Reviewer:	Yannis Karagiannis

1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD

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

One of the strengths of this thesis is the extensive literature review, particularly regarding potential theoretical frameworks for the analysis of the international cultural relations of the EU. A second strength is the very interesting account of the evolution of EU-Armenian relations, both generally speaking and in the field of culture more specifically.

On the other hand, I am not sure the paper deals with any specific research question, apart from taking on the descriptive task of presenting the evolution of Euro-Armenian cultural cooperation and applying to it a specific theoretical lens (i.e. proceeding to the “deductive application” the author mentions a handful of times).

This falls slightly short of the author’s statement that “*There is still uncertainty in [the] literature, however, regarding the views and attitudes of the partner countries toward their international cultural relations.*” This statement leads readers to think that the author would collect data and test different hypotheses about who thinks what and why in Armenia, and possibly also in other countries, regarding the EU’s policy. For example, are there different perceptions between Armenians with different partisan ideologies? With different levels of education? With age differences? With gender differences? With different levels <of knowledge of an EU language? With different locations (city-dwellers versus peasants), etc? To the extent that such a research set out to explain some variation, it would have been about a relevant research question.

Granted, the author also states that “*An underlying theoretical issue is what explains the nature of culture in the EU foreign relations: Is neoliberalism, post-liberalism, or constructivism at stake?*” And indeed, much of the thesis is more about this second topic. Yet this is rather problematic, in at least four different ways:

- (a) How does that issue relate to the previous one? Is it more important and urgent to answer this question than the previous one, and if so, why?
- (b) If this issue is an “underlying theoretical” one, then why does the author bother talking about research questions, hypotheses, research designs, data, etc? (Note that theoretical issues are usually analysed using theory, not using the vocabulary of empirical methods.)
- (c) Assuming that this is an “underlying theoretical issue” that can nevertheless be answered empirically, why isn’t the research design geared towards testing different hypotheses about the nature of culture in EU foreign relations? And
- (d) If this is the main research question the author wishes to study, why focus exclusively on EU-Armenian relations? (Note that the author himself excludes deriving any general lessons from the Armenian case.)

Recommendation: because the paper is full of very interesting summaries, thoughts, and information, none of which should be lost, I would strongly advise the author to keep that material, but to re-think the research topic and the intellectual scaffolding onto which all the rest hangs.

2. ANALYSIS

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

METHODOLOGY:

The empirical part of the paper focuses on a single case study. The author stipulates from the outset that “Due to the theoretical and methodological considerations (discussed under Research Design in detail) this research will be preoccupied with the case study of Armenia.”

In the methodological part, the author explains the sort of case study he conducts (a mixture of unique and revelatory). Yet, given that the single case study is the weakest possible form of research design, I was expecting to find at least some justification for not doing comparative research (e.g. comparing a country with cultural relations AND a free trade agreement with Armenia, which only has the former). Similarly, I was expecting some more detailed comments about how the detailed case study can produce evidence that disconfirms the theoretical hypotheses. And finally, I was expecting a longer discussion about the selection of the actors and the documents selected for analysis, as well as the inevitable issues of validity and reliability all researchers confront when interpreting and/or coding documents.

In the absence of all these elements, I found the methodology to be the weakest part of the entire paper. I strongly advise the author to attach the greatest priority to re-working that part.

THEORETICAL BACKING:

The manuscript is very strong in its review of the literature on cultural diplomacy, grand IR theories, and the political-economy instinct of using concepts such as excludable and rivalrous consumption of goods to analyse political phenomena.

It could go one step further to apply all these interesting theoretical tools to derive numerous testable hypotheses, which could then be tested either using a comparative research design, or within-case analysis.

Example: The discussion on types of goods could (and perhaps, if it is included in the paper, should) have led to hypotheses that make different predictions for different types of policies. One can easily imagine a two-by-two typology based on the degree of excludability and the degree of rivalry in consumption. The resulting types could then be compared to reality, to check whether the latter fits the theoretical typology.

3. CONCLUSIONS

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

The author states in the conclusion that “the current study has shown that the countries of the Eastern Partnership receive the chance to take part in the construction process at least with some limited scope due to challenges and constraints in the reality of the cultural sector”. This is at odds with his repeatedly stated claim that the research does not, and cannot, produce conclusion about any other country but Armenia.

4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE

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

The language is appropriate: the author maintains a correct, neutral tone throughout the paper. There are no verbal excesses, nor any attempts to offend any person or organization. The layout is good, too.

At the same time, the style of writing is often confusing, and linguistic (both grammatical and syntactic) mistakes abound. As a result, the paper often becomes all too difficult to read. The issue goes beyond the candidate’s intermediary level of command of the English language.

Finally, the citation style is often non-standard.

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

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

With some additional work (particularly in sharpening the research question and in defining the research design), plus some proof-reading by a native English speaker, this paper could easily become a paper worth an A or a B+.

Grade (A-F):	D
Date:	Signature:
September 9, 2021	Yannis Karagiannis

classification scheme

Percentile	Prague		Krakow		Leiden		Barcelona	
	Range	%	Score	%	Range	%	Range	%
A (91-100)	91-100 %	8,5%	5	6,7%	8,5-10	5,3%	9-10	5,5 %
B (81-90)	81-90 %	16,3%	4,5	11,7%	7,5-8,4	16,4%	8-8,9	11,0 %
C (71-80)	71-80 %	16,3%	4	20%	6,5-7,4	36,2%	7-7,9	18,4 %
D (61-70)	61-70 %	24%	3,5	28,3%			6-6,9	35,2 %
E (51-60)	51-60 %	34,9%	3	33,4 %	6-6,4	42,1 %	5-5,9	30,1 %

Assessment criteria:

Excellent (A): 'Outstanding performance with only minor errors';

Very good (B): 'Above the average standard but with some errors';

Good (C): 'Generally sound work but with a number of notable errors';

Satisfactory (D): 'Fair but with significant shortcomings';

Sufficient (E): 'Performance meets the minimum criteria';

Fail: 'Some/considerable more work required before the credit can be awarded'.