

Name of the student:	Olha Kotielnikova
Title of the thesis:	The EU response to the development in Belarus in 2021: the human rights scope
Reviewer:	Dr hab. Magdalena Góra

1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD

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

The student is analysing the role of the EU in protecting human rights in Belarus especially after the electoral crises of 2020 and a wave of terror against peaceful protesters. This tackles the important and not sufficiently researched theme of EU foreign policy toward Belarus and its potential to support human rights protection in authoritarian regimes. The research questions are valid and relevant but the way they were formulated is not very clear. The first and the second one (as stated on p. 9) seem to overlap and the third one on sanctions is also strangely formulated. Additionally, the research questions are descriptive and not very novel, and it is difficult to figure how they will be answered with applied methodology relying primarily on literature and documents analysis.

The student possesses some overview of the EU foreign policy and its stance toward Belarus and overall ENP countries. The thesis however demonstrates only basic understanding of the processes of EU foreign policy. Many statements on the EU stance are simplistic and not really grounded in literature. For instance, it is unclear why the EP is presented as the first institution of the EU in foreign policy analysis taken its still limited prerogatives. The literature review is very basic as regards the EU foreign policy.

2. ANALYSIS

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

Olha decided to employ very limited approach to study a chosen topic focusing on literature review and analysis of official documents. The main strength of the thesis is the good and sufficiently researched background case. The main limitation is the lack of theoretical basis of EU foreign policy toward Belarus with focus on human rights provided in the study. In addition, the methodology that was chosen limited a potential that this thesis have. Looking only on secondary literature and well-known documents did not provide any novel insights into the problem of the EU's approach to acts of authoritarian regimes such as Lukashenko's Belarus.

The empirical part is poorly presented and there are many questionable simplifying statements that are not really grounded in research such as: "Unlike the United Nations, the EU did not address issues of consistent human rights violations." (p. 29) – with no source provided for such statement or developing argument how it was assessed aside the list of some reports. Overall, the part on the EP proves that student has very limited understanding of the position of that institution within the EU foreign policy system. It is also difficult to understand It is also difficult to grasp the role of the UN as a referent point for comparison. The analysis of the EP documents is very superficial and without really understanding what the status is of analyzed documents within the EU foreign policy. It is also unclear why it is the EP and not the Council of the EU (or European Council for that matter) that is selected since it is the latter that is a key foreign policy institution. In the chapter concerning sanctions is better structured however the theoretical discussion on the nature of sanctions and its assessment shall be put in theoretical chapter and not in the results section. Also the empirical basis for that part is very limited and not original.

3. CONCLUSIONS

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

The conclusions are correctly written linking the results with theoretical background of the thesis. There are attempts by the student to advance discussion on the role of sanctions and the EU foreign policy.

4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE

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

The language of the thesis is fine even if sometimes shows stylistic weaknesses and grammar errors are frequent. The layout of the thesis is proper and clear. Citations, use of sources and bibliography is correctly applied.

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

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

I assess Olha's knowledge of the Belarusian case study very high. The thesis strength is coming from that background knowledge. The key weakness of the thesis is that it has a very poor theoretical background not really providing a structure for thesis. As a result, it seems that thesis is made of two only loosely linked parts – the one on the EP which has very little analysis provided and the one on sanctions that is better researched and presented but still have limited empirical basis. This is a result of a fairly poor empirical basis that is primarily secondary literature analysis and not very original and novel. However, even the limited findings that the student presented are already significant and interesting for the future role of the EU in reacting to human rights violations.

Grade (A-F):	B
Date: 12/09/2022	Signature: Magdalena Góra

classification scheme

Percentile	Prague		Krakow		Leiden		Barcelona	
	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'.