

Reviewer's report on the thesis 'To Run the Insurgency like a Business: Self-Defeating Patronage by the Principal in Eastern Ukraine' Dissertation Thesis by Martin Laryš

Reviewer: Karel Svoboda, Ph.D.

1. The thesis deals with the important and highly interesting topic of the armed uprising in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in 2014 as a case for a broader discussion. It explores the relations between the principal, in this case the Russian Federation and the rebellion groups. The topic focuses on the question of why the fragmentation of the rebel groups occurred and how it impacted delegation of the fighting on these actors. In doing so, it contributes to an understanding of both the broader context of the 2014 conflict in eastern Ukraine and the general understanding of the relationship between the hegemon and the paramilitary movements it controls and the problems of the delegation between principal and agent. Specifically, it focuses on the fragmentation of these movements and the problems this poses for the principal in terms of its interests in the form of the increasing costs due to the disintegration of these movements.
2. Methodologically, the thesis is a classic case study, but it also aspires to speak to the wider debate. The author has conducted many semi-structured interviews with which to construct his argument. The interviews were done mostly with people who are directly involved with the issue in Ukraine, such as analysts, pro-Ukrainian activists, etc. The method of interviews has its limitations, in this case in that access to direct participants in the armed uprisings is more than problematic. Thus, one can accept the fact, mentioned by the author, that he chose to interview analysts and activists from the Ukrainian side for reasons of security and feasibility. Russian perspectives are then supplemented by published sources, which is fully understandable bearing in mind the nature of the topic.. The author thus collected available data, i.e., mainly the views of experts from the Ukrainian side, which unfortunately also means that it was not entirely possible to discern in detail the role of Moscow in the armed 'uprisings'. If I dealt with the same topic, I would probably follow a similar approach. On a positive note, I appreciate that the author also points out the pitfalls of his approach.
3. Theoretically, the combines the principal-agent theories (self-defeating patronage) with the theories of delegation of armed rebellions. This is perfectly logical given the topic chosen for the thesis. The author is concerned with the cost of delegating combat operations to a rebel movement, in this case the region of eastern Ukraine. In doing so, he argues that delegation to fragmented movements proves extremely costly for the principal, and the principal himself is ultimately forced to enter the fray with his own forces, at great financial cost.
4. The structure of the paper is clear and fully corresponds to the argumentation presented in the thesis. The author defined all important terms, which helps to follow the argument. The theoretical-methodological part seems serves the purpose of framing of the empirical part. All the sections are well connected.
5. The author demonstrates an excellent knowledge of the existing literature on the topic, including often rare sources. He identified the research gap existing in a current literature and presents the importance of the topic persuasively. The author approaches the literature critically, which can only be appreciated.
6. I consider the empirical part of the text to be its strength, especially as regards the text on the 'separatist' movement itself. It shows well how the militant groups, irrelevant during most of their existence, rose to a prominence thanks to the patronage of Moscow. The thesis brings a deep insight into the reality of the fighting groups and their relations not only with the external actor, but also among themselves. The author addressed my remarks and improved the analysis of general Ukrainian affairs surrounding Maidan and afterwards.
7. I find the appendices useful as well, I also appreciate the timeline of the fighting based on my recommendations. As a result, I have no objections to this part.

8. English is not my first language, so I'll leave its level to someone else to judge. Still, turns of phrase like "in the Donbas" don't seem entirely accurate. I would then recommend going through the transliteration again and unifying it - in some cases, for example, Glazyev but Mozgovoi etc. are still present. The typos don't seem to be extensive, although I did find some. On the linguistic side, I would consider changing the "ich form" the author uses. Personally, it does not offend me in any way, but in the case of external reviewers it might provoke comments.

9. I consider the systematization of the various rebellious groups as very positive point of the thesis. As the author states, their number is estimated at plus or minus 160, which poses a major problem in their identification and motivations. The direct control by Russia, or rather the degree and extent of it, at least in the first phase of the fighting (until the replacement of Russian citizens by locals) is hardly traceable, and it is not surprising that the work could not reach a definitive resolution of this question. But the thesis is still able to answer the questions posed.

Generally, all my remarks from the previous review were reflected. As a result, I can recommend Mr. Laryš's thesis for a defence.

In Prague, 1 March 2023