European Politics and Society | EPS

Name of the student:	Nikolaus Graf
Title of the thesis:	Politicising EU Leadership Selection: Explaining the Success and Failure of the Spitzenkandidaten Procedure from the perspective of Postfunctionalism
Reviewer:	Tomáš Weiss

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

The thesis asks a very relevant question about the success and failure of the Spitzenkandidaten process introduced during the EP elections in 2014 and seemingly abolished during the elections in 2019. The thesis does not fully answer the question because instead of looking for an answer, it tries to confirm (and ends up refuting) a post-functionalist explanation of the developments. As a result, the identification of the research objective is partially misleading. The thesis is very well connected to the current literature on post-functionalism and, partially, politicisation. It also shows clearly that there are many competing explanations of the Spitzenkandidaten success and failure. The literature review is nicely done.

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

The thesis offers a very good introduction of the post-functionalist theory. It identifies its weaknesses and lack of operationalisation and provides its own way how to test the theory. The weak point of the research is the case study selection. While the author spends some time explaining the choice of France, and the case provides for a persuasive refutation of the theory, the limitation to the single country is not explained sufficiently and clearly constitutes a methodological weakness. The empirical sources for the research are rather limited, but the limitations are recognised and explained. The analysis itself is conducted in a transparent manner.

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

With all the limitations mentioned above, the thesis offers a conclusion that is directly linked to the analysed data and the research framework. The answer very partial and does not allow for the answer to the research question formulated in the introduction, but does answer a slightly different research question, namely to what extent post-functionalism offers an explanation of the developments in 2014 and 2019. Where the thesis is stronger is its identification of weak points of the theory.

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

The language is appropriate. There is no problem with the citation style or layout. The author adheres to academic standards throughout.

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

Nikolaus Graf has written an interesting thesis that highlights relevant issues in post-functionalist theory. The thesis is linked to the existing literature well and offers a number of future research questions. The weakest point is the case selection and the relevance of the conclusions that are based on the single case of France. Also, there is a mismatch between the research question formulated in the introduction and the research question the thesis actually answers.

Grade (A-F):	C
Date:	Signature:
29/08/2023	