

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:	Brian Shaev

### **1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD**

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

This thesis is an improvement on the first submission though it still suffers from considerable weaknesses. The research question is a valid one, regarding why the Spitzenkandidaten procedure was abandoned in 2019. Since the thesis is actually about France, then the literature review should also cover literature on the French positioning regarding the Spitzenkandidaten procedure. Instead there are lengthy excursions into general literature on the Spitzenkandidaten procedure as well as unnecessary descriptive ‘summaries’ that do not present original analyses.

### **2. ANALYSIS**

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

The thesis seeks to apply postfunctionalist theory to the Spitzenkandidaten procedure. The thesis claims to have selected France due to its lack of bias (one wonders about the Gaullist tradition regarding this claim), its representativeness (this claim is completely false, France is quite unique and one of the most powerful EU states and hence is not representative at all of EU member states), and its comparability (comparability with what? The political parties analyzed are not even the same between the two periods). The case selection is therefore not justified (instead the thesis makes a vacuous claim that “France presented a combination of factors that can strongly be considered to serve as a good case to be studied” p. 47. Further, if a literature review had been performed on the French government and Macron’s attitude towards the Spitzenkandidaten procedure, then much of the research design would be shown to be superfluous as Macron’s position and influence on the outcome is well known. The thesis design is not set up to make an original contribution to academic debate.

### **3. CONCLUSIONS**

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

The thesis performs a quantitative analysis of the frequency with which the term Spitzenkandidaten and its French translation occur in the French media. It occurs more in 2019, which does not seem to explain much. Fortunately the thesis is ‘saved’ by then analyzing French political party positions in 2014 and 2019 even if this is quite superficial and already also well known. The empirical foundation of the thesis is very thin but at least it exists now. The thesis then makes a not convincing larger claim regarding how this study reveals weaknesses in postfunctionalist theory. The thesis analyses two occurrences regarding one country, which is not a large enough sample to make bold claims such as this. Obvious counterexamples in which postfunctionalism can be expected to capture integration dynamics (like migration) are ignored. The thesis shows that the Spitzenkandidat procedure was not salient in French domestic discourse, hence the basic premise needed to begin a postfunctionalist analysis (politicization in the sense of salience with the public at large) is missing. The claims regarding postfunctionalism are therefore invalid.

### **4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE**

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

Generally the thesis is well written though there is a tendency to write sentences devoid of content.

### **5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT**

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

This is an improvement on the first version but there is still a case to be made that this thesis should not pass. As it is, there exists enough of an academic analysis, if superfluous to existing knowledge and superficial, to merit a slight pass.

<b>Grade (A-F):</b>	E (5)
Date:	Signature:
11 August 2023	

classification scheme

Percentile	Prague		Krakow		Leiden		Barcelona	
	91-100 %	8,5%	5	6,7%	8,5-10	5,3%	9-10	5,5 %
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'.