

## Evaluation of the doctoral studies of Mgr. Jakub Mazanec

I first noticed Jakub in the spring of 2015 when he studied the bachelor degree program in European Studies. At that time, he had already shown himself to be a talented but also hard-working and ambitious student. After his BA graduation a year later, he approached me with a request to consult me on his master's thesis project, which had the tentative title '*Water Wars - When Water Makes Blood Run. A comparison of water conflicts on the Nile, Tigris and Jordan rivers since the mid-19th century to the present.*' The purpose of the project was to capture, in a comparative perspective, how water and disputes over the development of water resources became the trigger of military conflicts. Obviously, the research thus outlined was beyond the scope of a master's thesis, but it clearly illustrated Jakub's interests and ambition. Jakub's interest in diplomatic history undoubtedly influenced the choice and framing of the topic; I recall he was seriously considering a career in diplomacy at the time. He approached the problem as a geopolitical one and intended to examine the conflicts at the level of colonial metropolises and foreign ministries of decolonized states. The choice of location was in line with his interest in the Arab world - after all, he was studying a Master's degree in History and Culture of Islamic Countries. He eventually successfully defended his MA thesis, after narrowing the topic down to the use of the waters of the Nile in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and focusing on Franco-British relations. Our consultations did not really transpire in the final text. However, in the conclusions, the thesis hinted to our debates, pointing out the technocratic rather than simply (geo)political character of water development disputes.

After defending his MA thesis, Jakub approached me again with the idea that he would like to continue in his research on water management across geopolitical borders, but this time focusing on the Cold War era in the Global South. Based on the results of his thesis and in the context of the development of Cold War historiography, he wanted to deal not only with conflicts, but especially with international cooperation. Within a few months, he put together a project that specified the problem in spatial (Africa and especially Ghana), temporal (1960s), and technological (dam building) terms. The central theme remained to some extent focused on the analysis of geopolitics of the (Cold War) superpowers through the lens of water structures, but compared to his MA thesis, Jakub abandoned the somewhat naive resource-grab concept in favor of a more nuanced analysis of hydro-development as

technopolitics. At the same time, being aware of the importance of various forms of international expert organizations, networks, and regimes that influenced and interacted with technopolitical interests of great powers and individual nation states, he decided to at least marginally focus on the role of Czechoslovak hydro experts who worked in Africa. Partly to “populate” the story, but mainly to use the available source base to analyze the complex international dynamics of Cold War water development in Africa also from below, from the perspective of individual actors. He succeeded with his Ph.D. project proposal and has been working on his dissertation under my supervision since the summer of 2019.

From the very beginning, Jakub clearly demonstrated his enthusiasm for research, his analytical skills and high work commitment. In the first year of the dissertation project, he successfully applied for a university grant that allowed him to visit foreign archives (including Ghana). Simultaneously, he began to create his own network of contacts and build a place in the international scientific community - he got actively involved in the work of the Tensions of Europe Early Career Scholars' Group, participated in ICOHTEC and ESEH summer schools and several international conferences and workshops (some of which he helped organize). During his Ph.D. studies he also participated in several ongoing research projects of the Institute focused on the Cold War period and, in the last phase, also in a research project of the Institute for Contemporary History of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. In all of these cases, he has demonstrated not only his ability, but also his willingness to invest more time and effort in research and academic work than common standards would require.

One aspect of Jacob's work that I would like to highlight concerns his ability to adapt to changing conditions and always deliver even in difficult circumstances, which I consider a talent for academic work equally important as diligence and analytical or formulation skills. In 2020, a year into the project, some of the foreign archives become effectively out of reach due to the covid outbreak - Jakub reacted promptly and reconfigured his research plan: domestic sources have gained a more prominent position than originally intended. He refocused the thesis from the Cold War competition for resources towards the role of Czechoslovak expertise in the context of global water resources development in Africa. In practice, this meant solving another set of unexpected problems - above all, it has become quickly apparent that the archives of most Czechoslovak institutions involved in water development programs abroad were either destroyed or remain unprocessed and therefore

not accessible. Jakub overcame even this pitfall by being able to quickly identify and interview people who participated in such programs, thus expanding his methodological register with an oral-historical approach.

Finally, I should evaluate the dissertation itself. However, I find it rather difficult to do so from the position of the supervisor. Many of the decisions the author made often directly reflected our frequent discussions or stemmed out of our collaboration in other research projects, and in retrospect it is certainly possible to say that not all of such decisions were correct or the best possible. Indeed, I would still recommend some editing before eventual publication of the dissertation, but overall, I consider the work to be of high quality. It certainly meets all academic standards and, in many cases, far exceeds them (e.g. range of archives) - which in itself is remarkable, considering the circumstances (covid-related problems) and the fact that Jakub completed the thesis in a relatively short time - in 4,5 years.

With this, I recommend the thesis for defense and look forward to further collaboration with the Ph.D. candidate, who has already become more of a colleague during his studies. During his studies, he made great progress not only in terms of academic work and ability, without losing his passion for the subject and the necessary curiosity. I believe that he is a promising scholar and has all the qualifications to become a valid member of the academic community.

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