IMESS DISSERTATION

Note: Please email the completed mark sheet to Year 2 coordinator (jiri.vykoukal@post.cz)

Please note that IMESS students are <u>not</u> required to use a particular set of methods (e.g. qualitative, quantitative, or comparative) in their dissertation.

Student:	Alexander Fuss
Dissertation title:	The Construction of Russian State Identity in International Relations through Discourses on Terrorism 2000-2008

	70+	69-65	60-61	59-55	54-50	<50
	A	B	C	D	E	F
Knowledge *Knowledge of problems involved, e.g. historical and social context, specialist literature on the topic. Evidence of capacity to gather information through a wide and appropriate range of reading, and to digest and process knowledge.*	X					
Analysis & Interpretation *Demonstrates a clear grasp of concepts. Application of appropriate methodology and understanding; willingness to apply an independent approach or interpretation recognition of alternative interpretations; Use of precise terminology and avoidance of ambiguity; avoidance of excessive generalisations or gross oversimplifications.*	X					
Structure & Argument *Demonstrates ability to structure work with clarity, relevance and coherence. Ability to argue a case; clear evidence of analysis and logical thought; recognition of an argument´s limitation or alternative views; Ability to use other evidence to support arguments and structure appropriately.*	X					
Presentation & Documentation *Accurate and consistently presented footnotes and bibliographic references; accuracy of grammar and spelling; correct and clear presentation of charts/graphs/tables or other data. Appropriate and correct referencing throughout. Correct and contextually correct handling of quotations.*		X				
Methodology *Understanding of techniques applicable to the chosen field of research, showing an ability to engage in sustained independent research.*	X					

ECTS Mark:	A/75	**Charles Mark:**	A/95	**Marker:** Jan Šír
Deducted for late submission:	No			**Signed:**
Deducted for inadequate referencing:	No			**Date:** Sept 8, 2024

MARKING GUIDELINES

A (UCL mark 70+) = A (Charles mark 91-100 - excellent): *Note: marks of over 80 are given rarely and only for truly exceptional pieces of work.*
Distinctively sophisticated and focused analysis, critical use of sources and insightful interpretation. Comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to the chosen field of research, showing an ability to engage in sustained independent research.

B (UCL mark 69-65) = B (Charles mark 81-90– very good)
C (UCL mark 64-60) = C (Charles mark 71-80 – good): A high level of analysis, critical use of sources and insightful interpretation. Good understanding of techniques applicable to the chosen field of research, showing an ability to engage in sustained independent research. 65 or over equates to a B grade.

D (UCL mark 59-55) = D (Charles mark 61-70 – satisfactory)
E (UCL mark 54-50) = E (Charles mark 51-60 – sufficient):
Demonstration of a critical use of sources and ability to engage in systematic inquiry. An ability to engage in sustained research work, demonstrating methodological awareness. 55 or over equates to a D grade.

F (UCL mark less than 50) = F (Charles mark 0-50 - insufficient):
Demonstrates failure to use sources and an inadequate ability to engage in systematic inquiry. Inadequate evidence of ability to engage in sustained research work and poor understanding of appropriate research techniques.

Please provide substantive and detailed feedback!

Comments, explaining strengths and weaknesses (_at least 300 words_):

This dissertation is a contribution to the study of identity construction and nation building in post-Soviet Russia. It examines how Russian state identity was constructed and securitized under Putin in the early 2000s. It examines Russian governmental and, more specifically, diplomatic discourse on terrorism as the perceived primary threat to Russia's security. It draws on critical discourse analysis (Laclau, Mouffe) as its theoretical and methodological approach of choice.

Discourse analysis is perhaps one of the most difficult approaches to the study of IR to master. It requires both a solid understanding of constructivist epistemology and ontology, and a great deal of creativity in reading and rereading the bulk of the speeches that make up the corpus of data to be analyzed in order to make sense of them. This is not a mechanical task. The student has done a good job on both counts.

Chapters 2 and 3 outline the theoretical framework of the dissertation. They summarize the main theoretical tenets of constructivism and how it relates to discourse theory in the social sciences. Chapter 4 introduces the methodology itself. It presents how it understands and further operationalizes the main concepts used, namely discourse, the terrorist threat, the terrorism-identity nexus, and diplomacy as a discursive practice.

The following chapters (chapters 5 to 7) provide an analysis of the materials produced by Russian diplomats within the United Nations during the period under study, which dealt with the issue of terrorism and were delivered under the respective agendas.

The analysis of the data corpus aimed at identifying the main ideological narratives used by Putin's diplomats at the UN to legitimize their actions on the issue of terrorism, both domestically and abroad. It identified three discursive representations of Russia that featured prominently in the speeches of Russian diplomats analyzed. These self-representations included Russia as a reliable international partner in the fight against terrorism, Russia as possessing a special civilizational status that sets it apart from other nations, and Russia as standing in the vanguard of the world's efforts to eliminate injustice.

The paper is well organized and well written. The narrative is easy to follow, as far as the topic allows. The presentation and style are fine and fully meet the requirements of the genre. I have only one small formal comment. The citation apparatus seems to mix two citation styles, the notes/bibliography style and the author/date method. But this is more of a technicality, nothing substantial.

Overall, the thesis is above average and demonstrates that the student has been able to conduct independent research at the postgraduate level and produce a convincing research report that is the result of original work. I see nothing that would prevent a successful defense with the highest grade.

Specific questions you would like addressing at the oral defence (_at least 2 questions_):

I liked your introductory note, in which you argued that Russian studies need a serious reassessment of its core tenets and that ideational factors do matter. Based on your findings, would you elaborate on this idea and outline how these factors may have influenced Putin's increasingly aggressive foreign policy, as evidenced by Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine?

Intrinsically linked to Russia's constructed state identity is Russia's view of the international order. Based on your findings, would you elaborate on how Russia sees its role in the current international order and what makes it so uncomfortable in the current setting?