Name of the student:	Álvaro Fernández Cruz
Title of the thesis:	From the EU´s Geopolitical Awakening to Strategic Culture Building: A Window into the HR/VP´s Discourse (2019-2024)
Reviewer:	Eliška Tomalová

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

In his thesis, Álvaro analyses Josep Borrell´s discourse on EU foreign policy with the aim to identify and examine the geostrategic elements and the HR/VP´s geostrategic lexicon. The time frame covers the period when Josep Borrell has represented one of the main EU foreign policy leaders who has had a crucial impact on the definition of the EU´s strategic culture and foreign policy identity (p. 21).
The main objectives of the research are clearly defined, the thesis seeks to answer the question: "How does HR/VP Borrell use geopolitics as part of his discursive efforts to build a common EU strategic culture, and what are the geographic dimension of his discourse?" as well as a set of sub questions (p. 5).
The literature review is of high quality, the author shows an excellent knowledge of relevant literature in IR and EU studies. Based on the critical literature analysis, he situates his research and develops an innovative conceptual framework and research design (p. 20-24).

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

The analytical level of the thesis corresponds to EPS MA thesis standards. Álvaro offers a two-part structure (coding/building a cartography of the HR/VP´s discourse – p. 24) and a three-level system of analysis (geostrategic discourse, strategic culture, foreign policy identity – p. 21). For the empirical study, the author works extensively with a closed set of primary sources consisting of four books that have been published since Borrell came to office in 2019 (2021, 2022, 2023, 2024).
The theoretical backing is strong, Alvaro builds on diverse constructivist theoretical strands (p. 12-19) and explains well the relevance of theoretical choices for his research.

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

The conclusions offer exactly what Álvaro promised in the introduction, the research objectives were achieved, and the conclusions are persuasive.
Some of the findings (for instance the disappearance of references to strategic autonomy in the discourse – p. 50) represent a valuable contribution to the analysis of foreign policy agency in the EU (comments on findings would maybe deserve more space in the thesis, however, the findings offer possible future research themes).

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

The English level is excellent. The thesis corresponds to academic standards, including citations and visual elements.

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

Álvaro wrote a very good thesis. The main positive elements are as follows:

The thesis contains several graphs and maps – the visualisations help to understand better the cartography of the discourse.

Excellent state of the art and critical analysis of the relevant academic literature on the topic. The author identified the gap in literature and was able to connect his research to relevant theoretical debates.

Well defined and innovative research framework.

Brilliant English level and logical structure, the thesis is very reader friendly.

There aren´t any major problems in the thesis. However, I suggest that in the defence Álvaro comments on the following:

In the analytical part, the author offers several explanatory elements (why Borrell has mentioned/has not mentioned a set of topics – for instance sanctions in the Middle East – p. 40) that seem not to be based in data analysis and look weaker.

I would also welcome a more analytical insight into the definition of different geographies that are "harder to represent on a map" (p. 33) and their connection to the geopolitical discourse.

Grade (A-F):	A
Date: 24/6/2024	Signature:

classification scheme

Percentile	Prague		Krakow		Leiden		Barcelona	
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'.