



Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

Author: Benjamin Maderstein,

Title: Escaping the Bear's Claw: The Effect of Russian Economic Statecraft on the Economic Resilience Efforts of Post-Soviet States

Programme/year: 23-KBS, 2023/2024

Author of Evaluation (supervisor/second reader): Supervisor

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Research question, definition of objectives	10	9
	Theoretical/conceptual framework	30	28
	Methodology, analysis, argument	40	37
<i>Total</i>		80	74
Minor Criteria			
	Sources	10	9
	Style	5	4
	Formal requirements	5	5
<i>Total</i>		20	18
TOTAL		100	92



Evaluation

Major criteria: Please see below

Minor criteria: Please see below

Assessment of plagiarism: No

Overall evaluation:

The thesis uses a strong quantitative method, mainly fixed-effects regression models, to study how Russia's economy affects the export diversification of post-Soviet countries. Focusing on product and market concentration dynamics allows for a detailed examination of the economic resilience of these states. The methodology is sound and appropriate for the research questions posed. Some sections are complex, particularly those dealing with theoretical frameworks and statistical models. Readers who are not specialists in the field may find these challenging. These sections might be simplified without sacrificing the sophistication of the argument to improve accessibility. The work presents a well-constructed argument that is consistently supported by empirical evidence. Each chapter builds on the last, leading to a well-supported conclusion. The thesis successfully addresses the research questions posed at the outset and demonstrates a high level of critical thinking and synthesis. The integration of different theoretical perspectives, particularly the recursive nature of economic resilience and Hirschman's theory of trade dependence, adds depth and rigour to the analysis. This theoretical foundation is the a very good choice for enabling a nuanced analysis of the effects of Russian economic statecraft on these states. The work would have benefited from a more explicit discussion of alternative theoretical perspectives, despite the well-integrated chosen theories. A more comprehensive and robust analysis could have been achieved by the work engaging with and critically evaluating other potential frameworks. The work's most important strength lies in its application of theory to the empirical data. The author successfully uses the theoretical frameworks to interpret the findings and understand the dynamics of export diversification in response to economic statecraft. The link between the theories and the data is excellent, and the analysis offers valuable insights into the resilience efforts of post-Soviet states. Recommended grade: A

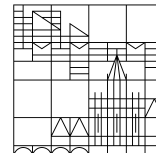
Suggested grade: A



**FACULTY
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Charles University

Signature:

Erkmanhil



Name and title of evaluator: **Jun. Prof. Dr. Michael Dobbins**

Please tick box: I am first supervisor second supervisor of the thesis.

Student number: not available; Charles University, Prague

Name of student: Benjamin Maderstein

Title of the thesis:

Assessment dimensions (listed items are optional criteria)		Assessment				
		Fail	Pass	Satisfactory	Good	Very good
1	Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: Definition and context • Research question 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comments: + The study explores whether Russian "statecraft events" (i.e. sanctions) prompt former Soviet Republics to diversify their export strategies. + Particularly interesting is the author's focus on state capture and natural resource dependence as potential intervening variables, which may hinder economic diversification. + The thesis thus addresses a very interesting, relevant and timely topic and sheds light on the economic resilience of former Soviet Republics in an era of Russian neo-imperialism and military aggression.						
2	Literature review/theoretical framework <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of the relevant literature • Gap in the literature • Theoretical argument • Research hypotheses 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments: + The literature review is comprehensive . + The main concepts addressed in the thesis are conceptualized and elaborated on in great detail, in particular "economic resilience" and "export diversification". + The theoretical argument is convincing and the theory is effectively applied to the empirical data. + The hypotheses are suitable for a MA thesis. - However, H1 and H2 seem to overlap with one another. - Also, the reader had to wait a long time for a clear conceptualization of state craft events. And it was not really clear whether the analysis is based on statecraft events (i.e. sanctions, etc.) in general or only towards the affected countries. For example, sanctions on Georgian exports or Russian military aggressions against one country may also affect the economic resilience strategies of other neighbouring countries not directly affected. The author could have been more precise about this. - Also, the hypotheses and main causal analysis seem come a bit late (first hypothesis on page 23, last hypothesis on page 49). The author essentially conducts two rounds of analyses, first focusing on all post-Soviet countries lumped together, and then later with a focus in specific events. A more compact and parsimonious approach and presentation would have made it easier to read the analysis.						
3	Research design <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case selection, data collection and method of analysis • Suitability of research design and methodological approach 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comments: + The case selection is fine and the data collection very ambitious. The methods are also very sophisticated. - However, see my comment above regarding the overall setup of the thesis. The presentation of the thesis could have been much more compact, based on step-wise regression models.						
4	Results <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data quality • Execution of analysis • Presentation of results 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comments: + The data meet high standards and the statistical analysis is very strong for a MA thesis - However, I do wonder whether the author distinguished between positive and negative statecraft events. Positive statecraft events could be, for example, favourable gas and oil prices for certain countries and markets. The author brushes on this issue on page 33, but I do not believe that it was integrated into the statistical models.						

(5)	Summary and Discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answer to the question • Broader implications of the findings • Critical discussion of own research 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comments: + The author finds that Russian statecraft events have a significant and positive effect on export diversification in post-Soviet states. The level of state capture decreases states' ability to diversify exports, whereby natural resource dependency proves to be relatively insignificant. + I particularly liked the data that was used to measure state capture and natural resource dependency. This was very well-reflected and provide much added value to the thesis.						
6	Write-up and presentation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure • Language and flow of the text • Acknowledgement of sources and quotations • Design and careful layout • Spelling and punctuation 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments: + The quality of the language is very good for a non-native speaker, - but there were indeed numerous problematic grammatical and stylistic issues throughout the text. + Sources are quoted and referenced properly.						

Summary and final assessment

The study addresses an interesting and current topic. The theory was well-reflected and the methodological approach met high standards. However, the text does include various repetitions and the presentation of the theoretical argument, the models and the statistical analysis could have been much more compact. This would have provided more space to focus more on country-specific reform pathways and/or deviations from the patterns established in the large-scale statistical analyses. Otherwise, it is a strong thesis which provides a solid foundation for further research and potential academic publications.

Grade: A (ECTS)

Date of signature: **10-9-2024**



Name of examiner: **Jun. Prof. Dr. Michael Dobbins**
..... (Signature examiner)