OPINION

Evaluation of the dissertation of Martin Milanov
for the awarding of the educational and scientific degree "PhD" in professional direction 3.3. Political Science EUROPEAN STUDIES - POLITICAL STUDIES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION - EUROPEAN IDENTITY
on the topic
Identity as Factor of the Foreign Policy of the European Union (EU) and China

The candidate Martin Milanov places an ambitious task – (1) to examine historical processes in China and the EU in forming identities; (2) how these identities reflect on the foreign policies of these subjects of international relations (IR); (3) on the opposite – how the entire world and IR influence the identities in the EU and China. The author collected and analysed a lot of materials, publications, documents. In general he used the relevant methodology.

For forming the EU identity he takes the period after the WW2 – crucial for building common European identity and solidarity. The author in-depth examines the development of the EU and its relations with the world as crystalizing its identity, but also presents the EU as a model for regional integration which affects others regions too.

For the formation of the identity in China the author argues important roles played the 'century of isolation' till 1970s and also the successful economic reforms of Dun Xiao Pin. As a result the central elements in the Chinese identity are the power of the Communist Party of China (CPC), the sovereignty, territorial integrity and economic development. The acceptance of mainland China into the UN in 1971 and later in WTO and other international organizations, gradually legitimate the CPC. Today China is recognized as the second economic power after the USA in the world and it plays a strong global role.

The dissertation in-depth covers the relationship between the Eu and China, based on their identity characteristics and the global changes and challenges in the last 50 years. For example, the EU and China find common themes, such as climate change and environment. The normative character of the EU and its adherence to democracy, rule of law, human rights influences the CPC and its role in international organizations and provokes debates in China about reforms, notwithstanding that China officially rejects these as 'external interference' in its domestic affairs.

The author argues that the EU influences the formation of Chinese identity on several levels – economic, political, cultural, etc. though the political level is resisted in China as problematic. These show that the EU plays role in shaping identity and helps China to adapt to the modern world. He concludes that the relations between the EU and China correctly reflect the identities of both the EU and China. The 'soft' power and the increasing cultural exchange between the Eu and China lead to better mutual understanding and acceptance of common values. This makes the Chinese society more open, despite the fact that the government tries to keep the traditional values and culture.

The influence of China on the European identity is also part of the analysis. The rise of China as a global economic power – and also political power – provokes re-thinking of the EU geo-strategies, and it needs to re-balance its economic interests with its adherence to democracy and human rights.
The relationship with China makes the EU more coherent and strategic in its foreign policy. It establishes new institutions and mechanisms to manage its relations with China and this also affects the European political identity. The political debates in Europe are also influenced by the EU relations with China. European leaders often make their positions on China clear and this forms accordingly opinions and priorities – ranging from calls for closer co-operation to warnings for potential risks.

China is one of the biggest trade partners of the EU and this interdependence creates new forms of economic identity in Europe and boosts innovations and tech exchange through investments and trade. This creates competition for European companies and make them sustainable. The EU shapes various policies, strategies, measures of protection from disloyal competition, etc. to manage its relations with China, and these strengthen the European economy globally.

The author argues that the most important role of the EU in the next years is to balance the relationship between the USA and China and to play diplomatically with China, as its foreign policy is a mix of historical experiences and the influence of the CPC on the public perceptions.

The dissertation is original, well structured, comprehensible, follows its logic.

Below listed some remarks in terms of corrections and improvements:

1. The Introduction stresses that the goal and task is simply to examine how the EU identity is influenced by its policies with China. However, this is very minimal as to the overall ambition of the title and the entire text of the chapters, where we see also examination of the Chinese identity, the Chinese foreign policy, incl. towards non-European states. What exactly makes the author choose these two actors as a subject of the research? One is the largest unitary state in the world, and the other is an integral union of 28 countries.
2. Both the formation of identities and the foreign policies of the two global actors are enormous fields for analysis and are very different objectively and subjectively. In China the foreign policy is central and hierarchical, run by a single powerful Presidential office without any chance for criticism or alternatives. In the EU it is exactly the opposite – the foreign policy is very fragmented and subjected to constant criticism, discussions.
3. The texts are often repetitive, many facts are listed and many statements are made more than once. It seems the author tried to extend and prolong some parts of the text as for these to ‘look longer’ and enlarge the volume, instead of using the space to provide more examples, arguments and evidence.

4. In some parts in the second part of the text the main focus – identity – is disappearing when the author enters into analysis of the foreign policy of the EU and China and the relationship between them.
5. Questions arise: Are all foreign policy decisions in the EU and in China reflective of identities? Are there problems with decisions based too much on national identities and less on realism, rationalism, constructivism. If yes, which are those decisions over-focused on identities, when, under which leaders of the EU and China were these made? And on the opposite – which decisions were not based on identities?
6. There should be more literature on the role of identities in foreign policy, there are missing authors, like Ursula Stark. The author provides literature on identities in the EU and China, and on their foreign policy, but not much references to literature connecting these two, what other authors say about how identities influence foreign policy. In the last 50 years there is vast literature on 'Identity Politics' which is not referred to in the text.
7. The first chapter is entirely on identities, the second – entirely on foreign policy of the EU and China, so far so good, but the expectation if that these two themes with merge in the third chapter. They did not and remain separated.
8. At the end the author lists a lot of theoretical and scientific achievements, but there are no proofs and evidence of these in the text.

Evaluation: POSITIVE

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